

LIFE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

An Introduction for Beginners

PART I

Chaucer to Ben Jonson

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FOREWORD

THE AIM of this book is not to provide a complete outline of English Literature, but simply to arouse interest. For this reason, the subject has been approached from the human angle only. Character has been made its basis, and our one principle in selecting authors and extracts has been to put before the beginner only what he or she is likely to find interesting.

Beginners are still too often alienated by being obliged to study an author before they are ready for him. We have an accurate memory of our own school days, and one of us since had twelve years' school practice in starting young beginners upon English Literature. Both experiences have been used in making this book. Its sins of omission may and must be grievous; but what it does contain has stood the test of actual practice. Whatever else it does to the beginner, it ought not to bore him.

Our plan has been, solely from the beginner's point of view, to leave the dull authors out, and put the interesting ones in. Many authors who are absorbingly interesting at a later stage have been omitted, as have many of historical importance. The selections and grouping are entirely arbitrary, and sometimes unrepresentative. Still, if we have produced what is, in the terms of our endeavour, a live and interesting book, we are unrepentant.

L. A. G. S.
M. R.

INTRODUCTION

W H Y B O T H E R to read English Literature at all ?

This is a perfectly fair question, and deserves a fair answer. The reason for reading is not to pass examinations, or secure any sort of cash advantage, neither is it to "improve our minds." Reading is an end in itself. Socrates, after he had been condemned by the Athenians, said that death would be no hardship to him. Either it would be one continual dreamless night, or if, as was maintained, there were an after life, it would give him the opportunity to meet all the most interesting people who had been on the earth before him.

This literature enables us to do, without the necessity of dying first. A great many of the most interesting people who have lived have left some sort of a record, whether in the form of stories, plays, essays, or poetry, of how they felt and what they thought. The object of reading, then, is simply to increase our capacity for pleasure.

"Yes" someone may object. "but I get all the pleasure I want out of thrillers and the daily paper."

This, again, is perfectly fair but not quite as sensible as it sounds. It is very much the same as saying "I like being in Shrewsbury, so I don't ever want to go anywhere else" or, at a restaurant, "I know I like that, because I have it at home so I won't try anything new." It is a timid, self-satisfied

attitude and to persist in it is short-sighted and silly. It is silly because, in the long run, what is good is more enjoyable than what is less good. By reaching what is good (always provided that we begin with something we can like and understand) we *increase* our power of enjoyment, until we can enjoy the best that is to be found and there is much more enjoyment, and more interest, in the best than in what is second-rate, third-rate, and tenth-rate.

Reading simply for pleasure, then, we have no ulterior purpose, and can read as naturally as we should read any story of our own choosing.

Why do we read stories? What interests us in them? Presumably, it is the way in which the story is worked out, and it is the characters what they do, how they feel, and what they think. Their actions, thoughts, and feelings show that they are human beings like ourselves. We make friends with them. If they are well described, and the kind of people we like, we may make friends who will last us all our lives.

“Yes” says the same objector, “that is all very well. I can recognise and like the characters in a modern story. They belong to the world I live in. But the characters in what you call ‘literature’ do not belong to my world, or to anything like it. and that is why I cannot take the same interest in them.”

It is to answer this very sensible objection that this book has been written. The great difficulty, in reading about characters who lived in the past, is to realise that they had thoughts and feelings like our own. As soon as we have realised this, we are over nearly all

our difficulty All that is left will be differences of speech

The *actions* of characters in books written long ago must of necessity be unlike our own, because almost all the surroundings and circumstances of their lives were different It is through their thoughts and feelings that we get to know them In this book, therefore, passages have been chosen from the various authors which will show

WHAT THE CHARACTERS THOUGHT and HOW THEY FELT.

It's one aim, from start to finish, has been to pick out what is interesting from this point of view Literature is a live subject The pleasures, the happiness, the friendship it can give are infinite Too many people are put off it by approaching the wrong authors and the wrong books first Confronted with something which does not interest them, they naturally lose hope, and resolve to direct their search for pleasure elsewhere to make friends with characters who are easier to recognise

Once we have realised that ordinary human feelings and ideas are little changed, we shall have broken down the highest barrier that divides us from literature and from the past, and the way to untold enjoyment and pleasure will lie open before us.

CHAPTER I

CHAUCER

1

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, the first English writer whose language we can readily recognise as our own, was born in or about 1340, and died on October the 25th, 1400. This means that he lived in Edward the Third's reign, through Richard the Second's and a fraction of Henry the Fourth's that he heard, as a child, the news of the Battle of Crecy, and escaped the Black Death in the same year that he fought in the Hundred Years' War, and lived to comment (we can only guess how) upon the deposition and death of Richard. The English of the poems we shall read is therefore more than five hundred years old. That in itself would prepare us to find great differences; yet almost the first thing that will strike us is its likeness to our own English, and the likeness of the people it describes to the people we know to-day.

The first definite knowledge we have of Chaucer is a mention of him, when he was some twenty-seven years old, as serving in the household of the wife of Lionel Duke of Clarence. In 1359 he was with the English army in France, and had the misfortune to be taken prisoner. Here he stayed nearly a year. After being ransomed, he was promoted to the King's household to be a "yeoman of the chamber," and, later, to be an Esquire. Then he was engaged in what we should now call the Diplomatic Service, visiting

Italy, France, and Flanders In 1374 he received a Customs House appointment in the Port of London, and we hear of a small yearly pension being paid to him by John of Gaunt The years 1385-86 brought him to the height of his public career, for in them he was made a Justice of the Peace (a magistrate) and Knight of the Shire Later, he was for two years Clerk of the Works at Westminster, and in the last years of his life he received a pension from Richard II, and the promise of a bigger one from Henry IV

It is important to know this much about him, in order to realise that he was an active, competent, and busy man, to whom serious matters were entrusted, and who at the end of his life was so well recognised and respected that both Richard and Richard's enemy were concerned to look after his welfare The popular idea that poets make poor men of affairs is certainly not borne out in Chaucer's case Very often, a writer's life has little bearing upon his work, and we do not need an account of his life in order to understand why he wrote as he did A knowledge of Chaucer's life, however, throws a real light upon his writings A number of slight and charming poems, for instance, were written when Chaucer was at the Court, to please benefactors or to commemorate special occasions That he should translate long poems from French and Italian is not surprising, when we know that he visited both France and Italy, and had to learn each language Nor is it surprising that, during the latter part of his life, he should devote himself to the completion of his peculiarly English work, the *Canterbury Tales*.

Historians of literature usually divided Chaucer's

life as a writer into three "periods" the first, while he worked under French influence; the second, under Italian, the third, when his work was purely English. This is a useful rough division, but we must be careful not to take it too literally. It does not mean that Chaucer woke up one morning and said "I am not going to be under French influence any longer. From to-day on, I am going to copy the Italians." None of our lives can be divided into watertight compartments. All that can safely be said is that we tend to grow out of one set of interests into another. So, a writer's interest shifts and Chaucer, after translating the *Roman de la Rose* and other poems from the French, turned his attention to the works of the Italian storyteller Boccaccio. From Boccaccio he got *Troilus and Criseyde*—not a translation, for he uses less than half of the original, and adds a great deal which is entirely his own. Besides this, one of the finest of the *Canterbury Tales*, that assigned to the Knight, is an altered and much compressed version of Boccaccio's *Teseide*.

2

In this first approach to Chaucer's work, we shall look at the *Canterbury Tales* alone. The plan is simple. A number of people, from almost every walk of life, are setting out from the Tabard Inn, Southwark, to make the pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. They have agreed to travel together, both for safety against robbers, and for good company. The Host, or landlord, of the inn proposes that, to pass the time on the journey, they shall all tell stories, and the teller of the story which is judged the best shall be given a feast at the other's expense, when

they return to the Tabard This thread connects the various stories, making them into a single work

The company number twenty-nine, without the Host On the road they are joined by another, the Canon's Yeoman Here is the full list —The Knight, the Squire, the Yeoman, the Prioress (head of a nunnery), the Second Nun, the Nun's Priest, the Monk, the Friar, the Merchant, the Clerk, the Sergeant-at-Law (a title now disused), the Franklin (a rich country householder who held his lands without having to pay either by rent or military service), the Haberdasher, the Webbe (weaver : cf the surname Webster, which means weaver), the Dyer, the Tapycer (carpet maker), the Cook, the Shipman (a sailor), the Doctor of Medicine, the Wife of Bath, the Parson, the Ploughman, the Miller, the Manciple (servant of one of the inns of court, who did the catering under the instruction of the steward), the Reeve (steward of a big estate), the Summoner (officer of the Bishops' court), the Pardoner (travelling clerk in holy orders, licensed to sell "pardons"), Chaucer himself, the Host (his name was Harry Bailly), and the Canon's yeoman

The thirty pilgrims between them give us an excellent idea of the state of society at the time They do not include noblemen, and they do not include robbers, tramps, or outcasts but they represent a thorough, sound section of the community, and in their arguments, their agreements, and their likes and dislikes of one another, we recognise them at once as living people like ourselves.

The Host's original plan was that each member of the company should tell four stories, two on the way to Canterbury, and two on the way back. This plan

had to be modified—possibly some of the company could not live up to it. At any rate, when they are well on their way, the Host reminds the Franklin that each of them must tell “atte leste a tale or two” and, later on still, before the Parson’s Tale, he limits the number of stories to “oon” each. Even so, the total of tales is not made up, and the pilgrims do not get as far as Canterbury.

They drew lots, and the telling of the first story fell to the Knight. This pleased everyone, for he was the chief man among the pilgrims, and they all liked him. Very possibly the Host so arranged it that he *should* draw the first lot—he felt responsible for the success of the story-telling scheme, and was anxious for the journey to pass pleasantly, with as many good stories as possible.

The Knight was modest, gentle, and courteous to all. He had fought many battles in the East, against the enemies of Christendom, and had three times fought in single combat, and “ay slayn his foo”¹

And though that he were worthy, he was wys,

And of his port² as meeke as is a mayde

He never yet no vileynye ne sayde,³

In all his lyf, unto no maner wight⁴

He was a verray parfit,⁵ gentil knyght

Before going any farther, we must decide how we are going to read Chaucer’s verse. The lines above will show you certain differences from present-day English. Others will soon appear, of which the most important is that in Chaucer’s time the final -e of a word was sometimes sounded as a separate syllable. Thus we

¹ Killed his opponent each time ²Behaviour ³Never said anything rough or coarse ⁴To any sort of person ⁵Perfect

have to be always on the lookout, in reading his verse, as otherwise many lines will seem to be one, two, or even three syllables short. The easiest way will be to mark each -e that has to be sounded with a. For instance —

*This ilke¹ worthy knyght hadde been also
Sometyme with the lord of Palatye²*

The final -e of "ilke" and "sometyme" must be sounded. It is a short syllable, not "ilkee," but "ilk-e." Sometimes, too, as in the first of these two lines, the accent falls on the last syllable of a word, not "also," as we say it, but "alSO."

Here are two more lines, to get us used to sounding final -e's —

*This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,
And heeld after the newe world the space³*

With the Knight was his son, the young Squire, a strong, handsome, curly-haired young man of twenty

*Embrouded⁴ was he, as it were a meede⁵
Al ful of fresshe floures whyte and reede⁶,
Syngyng he was, or floytyng,⁷ al the day,
He was as fressh as is the monthe of May
Short was his gowne, with sleeves longe and wyde,
Wel koude he sitte on hors and farre⁸ ryde,
He koude songes make and wel endite,⁹
Juste¹⁰ and eek daunce and weel purtreye¹¹ and write*

¹ Same ² In Asia Minor ³ This same monk let old-fashioned things go their own way (for all he cared). He held by the ideas of the new and up-to-date world. ⁴ Embroidered ⁵ Meadow ⁶ Red

⁷ Playing the flute ⁸ Skilfully ⁹ Compose ¹⁰ Joust ¹¹ Draw

*So hote¹ he lovde that by nyghterdale²
 He sleep namore³ than dooth a nyghtyngale
 Curters he was, lowely and servysable,⁴
 And carf biforn his fader⁵ at the table*

We have no room to go through all the company in detail, but must content ourselves with looking at a few of the more striking pilgrims. High on the list stands the Prioress. She was an accomplished and gentle lady, and her table manners, though nowadays they seem only what is to be expected, were of a delicacy which caused comment in those ruder times.

*And she was cleped⁶ madame Eglentyne
 Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne,
 Entuned in hir nose⁷ ful semely,
 And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,⁸
 After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe,⁹
 For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe
 At mete¹⁰ wel y-taught¹¹ was she with-alle,
 She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
 Ne¹² wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe¹³
 Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe,
 That no drope ne fille upon hire breste,
 In curteisie was set ful muchel hir leste¹⁴
 Hire over-lippe wyped she so clene,
 That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
 Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte¹⁵*

¹ Hotly ² At nighttime ³ Slept no more ⁴ Willing to serve
⁵ Carved before his father ⁶ Called ⁷ This was evidently the right way to intone ⁸ Cleverly ⁹ That is to say, her accent was very good, even though it was not Parisian. The Queen's sister was at this convent of Stratford-at-Bow, and the slightly Flemish French which was spoken by her circle was, as Chaucer well knew, fashionable at the time ¹⁰ Meat (i.e. table) ¹¹ Old form of the past participle.
¹² Nor ¹³ Deeply ¹⁴ She took great pleasure in courtesies
¹⁵ i.e. There was no morsel ("farthing") of grease to be seen in her cup when she had finished drinking

She was also exceedingly tender-hearted
She was so charitable and so pitous
She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous
*Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde*¹
Of smale houndes hadde she² that she fedde
With rosted flessch, or milk and wastel³ breed,
But soore wepte she if oon of hem⁴ were deed,
Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte⁵,
And al was conscience⁶ and tendre herte.

The Monk did not let his sacred office weigh heavily
 on his spirits. He was fat and well liking

His heed⁷ was balled that shoon as any glas,
*And eek his face as he hadde been anoynt*⁸
*He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt*⁹

The Friar was very popular with the ladies.—

Ful swetely herde he confessioun,
And plesaunt was his absolucioun

The description of the Clerk (Scholar) of Oxford,
 called here by its original name of Oxenford, gives us
 a clear picture of the difference between a university
 now and five hundred years ago

A Clerk ther was of Oxenford alsó,
*That unto logyk hadde longe y-go*¹⁰
As leene was his hors as is a rake,
And he nas nat¹¹ right fat, I undertake,
But looked holwe,¹² and ther-to sobrelly;
*Ful thredbane was his overeste courttepy*¹³, . . .

¹ Dead or bleeding ² She had some little dogs ³ Bread made of specially fine flour ⁴ Them ⁵ Hit it with a stick ⁶ Sensibility.
⁷ Head ⁸ As if he had been anointed ⁹ In good condition ¹⁰ Had studied logic for a long time ¹¹ Was not ¹² Hollow-eyed ¹³ Top cape

*For hym was leve¹ have at his beddes heed
 Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,
 Of Aristotle and his philosophie,
 Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrie²
 Of studie took he moost cure³ and moost heede,
 Nought o⁴ word spak he moore than was neede
 And that was seyde in forme and reverence,
 And short and quyke and ful of hy sentence⁵
 Sownynge⁶ in moral vertu was his speche
 And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche*

The Cook was clever at his business. Unfortunately, he suffered from an ulcer on his shin

*A Cook they hadde with hem for the nones,⁷
 To bouille the chiknes with the marybones,⁸
 And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale.⁹
 Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale,
 He koude rooste and sethe and bouille and frye,
 Make mortreux¹⁰ and wel bake a pye
 But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,¹¹
 That on his shyne a mormal¹² hadde he
 For blankmanger,¹³ that made he with the beste*

The Shipman came from Devon, as did so many after him. Chaucer suggests that he lived at Dartmouth, and as a group of Dartmouth seamen were at that time making themselves notorious as pirates, it is highly probable that Chaucer's Shipman was drawn from one of these actual men.

*The hote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun,
 And certeinly he was a good felawe*

¹ He would rather ² Fiddle or small harp ³ Care ⁴ One
⁵ Serious meaning (Latin *sententia*) ⁶ Eloquent ⁷ For the
 occasion ⁸ Marrowbones ⁹ Flavouring powder and spice ¹⁰ A
 kind of stew ¹¹ Seemed to me ¹² Ulcer ¹³ Blancmange

*Ful many a draughte of wyn hadde he y-drawe
 Fro Burdeaux-ward,¹ whil that the chapman sleepe
 Of nyce conscience took he no keepe
 If that he faught, and hadde the hyer hond,²
 By water he sente hem hoom to every lond³
 But of his craft to rekene wer his tydes,
 His streames and his daungers hym bisides,
 His herberwe and his moone, his lode-menage,
 There nas noon swich from Hulle to Cartage⁴
 Hardy he was, and wys to undertake⁵
 With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake
 He knew wel alle the havenes, as they were,
 From Gootlond to the Cape of Fynystere,⁶
 And every cryke in Britaigne⁷ and in Spayne
 His barge y-cleped was the Maudelayne*

The Doctor was first and foremost an astrologer, since all medicine at the time was held to depend upon a knowledge of the heavens. He was learned in the works of the old physicians, and made a very good living out of his patients. The Wife of Bath was a lively and outspoken lady who had had five husbands. She was a little hard of hearing, but otherwise excellent company. She wore a very good linen, and was more skilful in cloth-making than those of Ypres and Ghent. The Parson practised what he preached.

*And though he hooly were and vertuous,
 He was to synful man nat despitous,⁸*

¹ Coming from Bordeaux. Merchants used to fetch wine from there, and if one of them was asleep, the Shipman would steal some of his wine on the voyage. ² The upper hand. ³ He threw his prisoners into the sea. ⁴ There was no sailor from Hull to Carthage

who was better able to calculate the tides, the currents, harbourage, the moon, or pilotage. ⁵ In making bets. ⁶ He knew all the harbours from the South of Sweden to the North of Spain. ⁷ Brittany

⁸ Scornful

*Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne,¹
 But in his techyng discreet and benygne²
 To drawen folk to hevene by fairnesse,
 By good ensample, this was his bisynesse
 But it³ were any persone obstinat,
 What so he were, of heigh or lough estat,⁴
 Hym wolde he snybben⁵ sharply for the nonys⁶
 A better preest I trowe that nowher noon ys*

The Miller was a regular Hercules

*The Millere was a stout carl⁷ for the nones,
 Ful byg he was of brawn and eek of bones,
 He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre,⁸
 Ther nas no dore that he nolde heve of harre⁹
 Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed
 His berd, as any sowe, or fox, was reed,
 And therto brood, as though it were a spade
 Upon the cope¹⁰ right of his nose he hade
 A werte,¹¹ and theron stood a toft of herys,
 Reed as the brustiles of a sowes erys¹²
 His nosethurles¹³ blake¹⁴ were and wyde,
 A swerd and a bokeler¹⁵ bar he by his syde,
 His mouth as wyde was as a greet forneys,¹⁶
 He was a janglere¹⁷ and a golhardeys¹⁸
 A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
 And therwithal he broghte us out of towne*

The party had other music, for the Pardoner sang,
 and the Summoner "bar to hym a stif burdoun"

¹ Domineering or disdainful ² Benign ³ If ⁴ High or low degree ⁵ Snub, reprove ⁶ "For the nones"—for the occasion It is put in 2 lines further down more for the sound than for the meaning
⁷ A stout fellow ⁸ A thick-set fellow ⁹ Would not heave off its hinges ¹⁰ Top ¹¹ A wart ¹² A tuft of hair as red as the bristles in a sow's ears ¹³ Nostrils ¹⁴ Black "Blake" survives to-day in the surname Blake ¹⁵ Sword and buckler ¹⁶ A great furnace
¹⁷ A great talker ¹⁸ Buffoon

(sang the bass part) Thus, all happy and friendly, the party set out upon their way

3

The most important man among them was the Host
There is only a short account of him in the Prologue

*A large man he was, with eyen stepe,¹
A fairer burgeys is ther noon in Chepe²,
Boold of his speche, and wys and well y-taught
And of manhod him lakked right naught³*

Once the pilgrims were on the road, however, he took good-humoured charge of them all, decided who was to tell stories each day, and said exactly what he thought of each tale To the Monk, for instance, who was long-winded, he said

*'Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse !
Youre tale anoyeth all this compaignye ;
Swich⁴ talkyng is nat worth a boterflye⁵*

There is no doubt that many of the Canterbury pilgrims were portraits of living people known to Chaucer and easily recognisable by his readers The Host is one of these Chaucer gives his name, Harry Bailly, and there was a real Harry Bailly at that time, who was really landlord of the Tabard Inn at Southwark, and who had a wife called Christian. Chaucer's Harry Bailly had a wife too, and was continually lamenting the fact On the road, however, he was as cheerful as anyone He knew, as a good landlord should, what respect was due to each person in his

¹ Bright eyes ² There was no better citizen in all Cheapside
—the great market-place of London ³ Of manhood he lacked
nothing ⁴ Such ⁵ Butterfly

company When he spoke to the gentle Prioress, he asked her "as curteisly as it had ben a mayde" if she would tell her tale next. Later, when the Monk annoyed them all, the Host said roundly, "Thou art a fool," and he turned to the Nun's Priest—the Prioress' chaplain and secretary—and asked him to tell them something cheerful

*'Com neer, thou preest, com hyder,¹ thou sir John
Telle us swich thyng as may oure hertes glade² ;
Be blithe, though thou ryde upon a jade
What thogh thyn hors be bothe foule and lene ?
If he wol serve thee, rekke nat a bene³ ,
Looke that thyn herte be murie⁴ evermo.'*

This is the tale that the Nun's Priest told

The Nun's Priest's Tale of the Cock and Hen

Once in a poor widow's farmyard there lived a handsome cock named Chauntecleer, and his favourite hen, the courteous, discreet and debonair Pertelote. Chauntecleer crowed more beautifully than any other cock in the land

*His voys was murier than the murie organ
On messe dayes that in the chirche gon⁵
His coomb was redder than the fine coral,
And batailled⁶ as it were a castile wal ,
His byle⁷ was blak, and as the jeet it shoon ,
Lyk asure⁸ were his legges and his toon⁹*

Early one morning, Chauntecleer began groaning in his sleep. Pertelote woke him, and he confessed that

¹ Hither ² Something that will cheer us up ³ Why worry?—compare the modern "Don't give a bean!" ⁴ Merry ⁵ That plays on mass days in the church ⁶ Battlemented ⁷ Beak It shone like jet ⁸ Azure ⁹ Toes

he had had a terrifying dream about a fox Pertelote, after abusing him roundly for a coward, proceeded to prove to him, by quoting from the classics, that dreams were "vanitee" She displayed uncommon learning, but he was a match for her, citing Cicero, Homer, and the Bible

This argument over, they walked in the sun with the other hens, and Chauntecleer began to sing It happened that a wily fox was lying in a vegetable-patch near by He complimented Chauntecleer on his excellent voice, and begged him to sing again Chauntecleer, who had been frightened at first to hear the fox speak, was flattered by this praise but his vanity was his undoing

*This Chauntecleer stood hye upon his toos
 Strecchyng his nekke, and heeld his eyen cloos,¹
 And gan to crowe loude for the nones,²
 And daun Russell,³ the fox, stirte up atones,⁴
 And by the gargat hente Chauntecleer,⁵
 And on his bak towards the wode hym beer⁶*

Immediately the farmyard was in an uproar The poor hens began to shriek, and the widow and her two daughters came hurrying out of their house, and they all gave chase "Out ! harrow !" they cried, and "Weylaway"

*'Ha ! ha ! the fox !' and after him they ran,
 And eke with staves many another man ,*

¹ Shut his eyes ² For the nones see p 23 note 6 This phrase used to be "for then (the) once," but the "n" of "then" was transferred to the following word The opposite has happened in "umpire" and "apron," which used to be "numpire" and "napron" ³ "Russell" and "Reynard," both meaning "red," are names frequently given to the fox ⁴ Jumped up at once ⁵ Seized Chauntecleer by the throat ⁶ Carried him off

*Ran Colle, our dogge, and Talbot, and Gerland
 And Malkyn, with a dystaf in her hand ,
 Ran cow and calf, and eke the verray hogges,
 So were they fered for berkyng of the dogges,¹
 And shoutyng of the men and wommen eke ,
 They ronne so hem thoughte hir herte breek.²
 They yolleden,³ as feendes doon in helle ,
 The dokes cryden, as men wolde him quelle ⁴
 The gees, for feere, flownen over the trees ;
 Out of the hye cam the swarm of bees.*

Here is a farmyard scene that might happen to-day

Chauntecleer had his wits about him, however, and he was able to save himself. He spoke to the fox, who was carrying him in his mouth "Sir," he said, "If I were you, I should turn and tell all these people that they may as well go home again, since you are determined to eat me" The fox thought this an excellent plan, but when he opened his mouth to speak, Chauntecleer broke skilfully from him, and flew away to safety

The Host and all the company were delighted with this tale. On the next day's journey they had another which also pleased them very much The doctor's tale had depressed them, and the Host, after commenting indignantly upon the cruel fate of Virginia, complained

*'But wel I woot thou doost myn herte to erme⁵
 That I almoost have caught a cardynacle ⁶
 By corpus bones ' but I have triacle,⁷
 Or elles a draughte of moyste and corny ale,
 Or but I heere anon⁸ a myrie tale,*

¹ They were so frightened by the barking of the dogs ² They ran until they thought their hearts would break ³ Yelled ⁴ The ducks quacked as if they were going to be killed ⁵ You make my heart grieve so much ⁶ Stomach-ache, heartburn ⁷ Unless I have some treacle ⁸ At once

Myn herte is lost, for pitee of this mayde '

Then turning to the Pardoner, he asked him to tell them a story which would cheer them up .

*' Thou beel amy,¹ thou Pardoner,' he sayde,
' Tell us som myrthe, or japes,² right anon ! '*

The Pardoner said he would,

*' But first,' quod he, ' heere at this ale stake
I wol both drynke and eten of a cake.'*

The Pardoner's Tale.

The Pardoner's Tale concerned three drunkards, and he took the occasion to blend with it a fearsome sermon on the ill-effects of "dronkenesse" and "glotonye," supported by a number of learned instances, and picturesquely phrased

Three rogues were sitting drinking in a tavern one morning, when they saw a dead man being carried to his grave "Go and find out who that is," said one of them to his boy. "I can tell you, sir," said the boy "He used to be one of your friends, and he was killed suddenly, last night, by a thief called Death"

The three drunkards were indignant when they heard this, and when they thought of all the other people Death had killed that year "He lives quite near here," said one "Let us go and kill him."

*' Herkneeth,³ felawes, we three been al ones,
Lat ech of us holde up his hand till oother,⁴
And ech of us bicomen otheres brother,
And we wol sleen⁵ this false traytour, Deeth '*

¹ Beel amy—"my good friend" ² Jests ³ Listen ⁴ To the other
⁵ Slay

They set off at once, and before they had gone half a mile they met an old man. They greeted him rudely, asking him why he bothered to live. The old man, after mildly rebuking them for their bad manners, explained that Death would not take him. The drunkards then accused him of being in league with Death :

*' For soothly thou art oon of his assent¹
To sleen us yonge folk, thou false theef ' '*

" Tell us where Death is," they demanded, and the old man pointed up a crooked path to a grove of trees. " Se ye that ook ? " he said. " Right there ye shal hym fynde."

They hurried immediately to the oak, but when they reached it they found something which made them forget all about Death. There on the ground lay no less than seven bushels of shining gold florins. They sat down at once beside it. " This is ours," they said, " for we found it " It would not be safe, however, to carry so much money home to their houses in broad daylight.

*' Men wolde seyn² that we were theves stronge,
And for our owene tresor doon us honge³ ' '*

Accordingly, they decided to wait till nightfall, and sent the youngest off to the town to fetch bread and wine. As he went, he thought out a way of killing the other two and keeping all the treasure himself. He decided to poison them.

*And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he tarie,
Into the town, unto a pothecarie,⁴*

¹ Plot ² Say ³ Have us hanged ⁴ Chemist

*And preyde hym that he hym wotde selle
Som poyoun, that he myghte his rattes quelle*¹

He put the poison into some bottles of wine, and went back to the wood. But the other two rogues had had the same idea. They did not mean to share the treasure, and as soon as he arrived, they stabbed him.

*And whan that this was doon thus spak that oon
'Now lat us sitte and drynke, and make us merie,
And afterward we wol his body berie'*

They took up the bottles of wine, drank the poison, and died. Thus, as the old man had said, they found Death under the oak tree.

When he had finished, the Pardoner offered his pardons for sale, and suggested that the Host should buy the first.

*'I rede² that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
For he is moost enveloped in synne³'*

Not unnaturally, this annoyed the Host, especially as the Pardoner, before he began his tale, had gleefully explained that his holy relics were all fakes, and that the objects which he showed the "lewed (simple) folk" were in reality "pygges bones" and the like. The Host replied hotly, but the Knight made peace, and "anon they kiste and yden forth hir weye."

It would take too long to tell all the stories of the Canterbury pilgrims. Some were amusing, and some very dull. And one of the dullest of all, the Tale of Melibeus, Chaucer slyly puts into his own mouth.

¹ Kill ² Advise ³ Enveloped—sunk in sin

When the Host asked him to tell his story, he laughed at him for his timid looks and his shyness This is Chaucer's own account

Bihoold the murye wordes of the Hoost to Chaucer

*Whan seyde was al this miracle, every man
As sobre wds that wonder was to se,
Til that oure Hooste jopen tho bigan,¹
And thanne at erst² he looked upon me,
And seyde thus 'What man artow ? ³ quod he ,
'Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare ,
For ever upon the ground I se thee stare*

*Approche neer, and looke up murily
Now war yow⁴ sires, and lat this man have place ,
He in the waast⁵ is shape as wel as I ,
This were a popet in an arm tenbrace⁶
For any womman, smal and fair of face
He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce,
For unto no wright dooth he dalraunce ⁷*

*Say now somewhat, syn oother folk han sayd⁸ ,
Telle us a tale of myrthe, and that anon,'
'Hooste ', quod I, 'ne beth nat yvele apayd,⁹
For oother tales certes kan I noon,
But of a rym I lerned longe agoon '
'Ye¹⁰ that is good,' quod he, 'now shul we heere
Some deyntee thyng, me thynketh by his cheere ' ¹*

It is no "deyntee thyng" that they hear, however, and the Host is justly rude about Chaucer's powers of

¹ Began to make jokes ² For the first time ³ Art thou ⁴ Take care ⁵ Waist ⁶ Puppet, doll, for a woman to embrace ⁷ He does not talk pleasantly to anyone ⁸ Since other folk have had their say ⁹ Don't be angry ¹⁰ Yes

story-telling It is to the real Chaucer's powers of story-telling, though, that we owe the Host himself and the Pilgrims and all the Canterbury Tales, which are some of the best stories in English Literature Chaucer may have seemed to "stare upon the ground," but he missed nothing, and could see the funny side of everyone, including himself For humour, vigour, and sheer enjoyment, there is nothing to equal the Canterbury Tales, until we come to the great comic scenes in Shakespeare and both give us that understanding and enjoyment of ordinary, everyday English character which is the richest part of our natural heritage We could meet and talk to Harry Bailly or the Wife of Bath, as we could meet and talk to Falstaff or Justice Shallow, with an immediate recognition of qualities which the passing of centuries has done nothing to change.

CHAPTER II

THE PASTON LETTERS

I

THE CANTERBURY Pilgrims were men and women away from home, meeting and travelling and talking in public. The Paston Letters show us what home life was like in those days, and tell us the everyday affairs of a large and busy family. They are five centuries old, but as we read them we see that people then thought and felt almost exactly as we think and feel to-day, and that families were very much the same, quarrelling, and making friends, writing home for new clothes and for more pocket-money.

The Paston Letters are a large collection from all kinds of people, named after the Norfolk family whose life they chiefly concern. They were written in the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III, in the midst of the Wars of the Roses. But, although they mention the Wars and political troubles in their letters, they are much more interested in their own family affairs. The first thing that Sir John Paston tells his mother about the battle of Barnet, where his brother fought, is that that brother (also called John) "is hurt with an arrow in his right arm beneath the elbow, and I have sent him a surgeon which hath dressed him, and he telleth me that he trusteth that he shall be all whole within right short time." Some time after this, in the same letter, he just mentions

that " Item, my lord archbishop is in the Tower
There are killed upon the Field, half a mile from
Barnet, on Easter Day, the Earl of Warwick, the
Marquis Montagu, Sir William Tyrell, Sir Lewis
Johns, and divers other esquires "

The Pastons were determined that their children
should be well brought up There is a paper (not a
letter this time) headed " Errands to London of Agnes
Paston, the 28th day of January, 1457, the year of
King Henry VI, the 36th " These were her errands —

" To pray Greenfield to send me faithfully word by
writing how Clement Paston hath done his endeavour
in learning

" And if he hath not done well, nor will not amend,
pray him that he will truly belash him till he will
amend , and so did the last master, and the best that
ever he had at Cambridge

" Item, to see how many gowns Clement hath, and
they that be bare, let them be raised ¹ .

" He hath a short green gown And a short muster-
develers² gown, were never raised

" And a side³ russet gown furred with beaver was
made this time two years

" Item, to do make me⁴ six spoons of eight ounces of
troy weight, well fashioned and double gilt

And say Elizabeth Paston that she must use herself
to work readily, as other gentlewomen do, and some-
what to help herself therewith

" Item, to pay the Lady Pole 26s and 8d for her
board.

¹ Let them have a new nap set upon them ² Probably " Mestier
de Velours," French, a half velvet ³ Probably a long gown ⁴ Get
made for me

“ And if Greenfield hath done well his devoir to Clement, or will do his devoir, give him the noble ¹

AGNES PASTON ”

We are not told if Clement was doing his work well, or whether Greenfield had to “ belash ” him Agnes Paston believed that if you spared the rod you spoiled the child She was very fond of her children , but when Elizabeth (mentioned in the above “ errands ” as living in the house of Lady Poole as a lady-in-waiting) showed signs of not wanting to marry the man her mother intended for her, she was “ beaten once in the week or twice, and sometimes twice on a day, and her head broken in two or three places ”

The pleasanter and more usual side of the children’s bringing up is seen in a letter from young William Paston, a boy at Eton, to “ his worshipful brother John Paston ” He suggests an exeat, and that he needs, among other things, two shirts and a pair of slippers

“ Right reverend and worshipful brother, I recommend me unto you, desiring to hear of your welfare and prosperity, letting you weet² that I have received of Alweder a letter and a noble in gold therein , furthermore my creanser³ Master Thomas (Stevenson) heartily recommended him to you, and he prayeth you to send him some money for my commons, for he saith ye be 20s in his debt, for a month was to pay for, when he had money last , also I beseech you to send me a hose cloth, one for the holydays of some colour, and another for the working days how coarse soever

¹ 6s 8d ² Know ³ Creditor in this case, his housemaster

it be it maketh no matter, and a stomacher, and two shirts, and a pair of slippers and if it like you that I may come with Alweder by water, and sport me with you at London a day or two this term time, then ye may let all this be till the time that I come, and then I will tell you when I shall be ready to come from Eton by the grace of God, who have you in his keeping
Written the Saturday next after All-hallows day with the hand of your brother,

WILLIAM PASTON "

Here is a fuller letter, from the same boy, which relates among other things the beginning of a romance

" Right reverend and worshipful brother, After all duties of recommendation I recommend me to you, desiring to hear of your prosperity and welfare, which I pray God long to continue to his pleasure and to your heart's desire ; letting you weet that I received a letter from you, in the which letter was 8*d* with the which I should buy a pair of slippers

" Farthermore certifying you as for the 13*s* 4*d*. which ye sent by a gentleman's man for my board, called Thomas Newton, was delivered to mine hostess, and so to my creanser, Mr Thomas Stevenson , and he heartily recommended him to you ; also ye sent me word in the letter of 12*lb*. of figs and 8*lb* of raisins¹ ; I have them not delivered, but I doubt not I shall have, for Alweder told me of them, and he said that they came after in another barge

" And as for the young gentlewoman, I will certify you how I first fell in acquaintance with her , her father

¹ For him to eat in Lent

is dead, there be two sisters of them, the elder is just wedded, at which wedding I was with mine hostess, and also desired¹ by the gentleman himself, called William Swan, whose dwelling is in Eton So it fortune that mine hostess reported on me otherwise than I was worthy,² so that her mother commanded her to make me good cheer, and so in good faith she did, she is not abiding where she is now, her dwelling is in London, but her mother and she came to a place of hers five miles from Eton where the wedding was, for because it was nigh to the gentleman which wedded her daughter, and on Monday next coming, that is to say, the first Monday of Clean Lent³, her mother and she will go to the pardon⁴ at Sheene,⁵ and so forth to London, and there to abide in a place of hers in Bow Churchyard; and if it please you to inquire of her, her mother's name is Mistress Alborow, the name of the daughter is Margaret Alborow, the age of her is, by all likelihood, eighteen or nineteen years at the farthest, and as for money and plate, it is ready whensoever she were wedded, but as for the livelihood, I trow not till after her mother's decease, but I cannot tell you for very certain, but you may know by inquiring.

“And as for her beauty, judge that when you see her, if so be that ye take the labour, and specially behold her hands, for and if it be as it is told me, she is disposed to be thick

“And as for my coming from Eton, I lack nothing but versifying, which I trust to have with a little continuance

¹ Invited ² Beyond what I was worthy of ³ An old name for Lent ⁴ Festival of the patron saint of a church, at which pardons were granted ⁵ Richmond

*Quare, Quomodo. Non valet hora, valet mora
Unde di*

*Arbore jam videas exemplum Non die possunt
Omnia suppleri, sed hi illa mora.*

And these two verses aforesaid be of mine own making
No more to you at this time, but God have you in his
keeping

“Written at Eton the even of Saint Mathias the
Apostle, in haste, with the hand of your brother

WILLIAM PASTON, JUNIOR.”

It does not take any great acquaintance with “verifying” to see that William was an optimist

Even when they were grown up, the Pastons had to write home for clothes and for money. Clothes were made to last many years in those days, and getting new ones was a serious matter; and as for money, although the Pastons were some of the wealthiest people in Norfolk, and owned a great deal of land, ready money was always scarce, and sometimes Sir John himself had to write and ask his mother for ten shillings. Another John, “John Paston the youngest” as he signs himself, clearly had neither money nor stockings when he wrote home —

“Also, mother, I beseech you that there may be purveyed some mean that I might have sent me home by the same messenger two pair of hose, one pair black and another pair of russet, which be ready made for me at the hosier’s with the crooked back, next to the Black-Friars’-Gate within Ludgate, John Pampynge knoweth him well enough I suppose, and¹ the black

¹ If

hose be paid for he will send me the russet unpaid for , I beseech you that this gear be not forgotten, for I have not an whole hose for to don , I trow they shall cost both pair 8s."

At Christmas families like the Pastons used to have a very good time, with charades ("disguisings") and songs and games. This letter from Margery Paston to her husband tells how, out of respect for the recent death of the head of the house, some of their friends kept Christmas quietly. It was written on Christmas Eve 1484

"Right worshipful husband, I recommend me unto you please it you to weet¹ that I sent your eldest son to my Lady Morley to have knowledge what sports were used in her house in Christmas next following after the decease of my lord her husband , and she said that there were none disguisings, nor harping, nor luting, nor singing, nor none loud disports , but playing at the tables, and chess, and cards , such disports she gave her folk leave to play and none other "

2

The Paston women were all good managers, and often did much of their husbands' business with farmers and lawyers and bailiffs. Here a servant is being troublesome.—

"I pray you that you will assure to you some man at Caister² to keep your buttery, for the man that ye left with me will not take upon him to breve³ daily as ye commanded , he saith he hath not used to give a reckoning neither of bread nor ale till at the week's

¹ Know ² One of the Paston estates ³ Enter up his accounts

end, and he saith he wot well that he should not condeneth¹, and therefore I suppose he shall not abide, and I trow ye shall be fain to purvey another man for Symond, for ye are never the nearer a wise man for him

“ I am sorry that ye shall not at home be for Christmas

“ I pray you that ye will come as soon as ye may ; I shall think myself half a widow, because ye shall not be at home, etc God have you in his keeping Written on Christmas even

By your servant and beadswoman

MARGERY PASTON.”

In those troubled times, servants needed other qualifications besides those we usually expect to-day ; as witness the following letter —

“ Right well-beloved brother, I commend me to you , letting you weet that I have waged², for to help you and Daubenay to keep the place at Caister, four well assured and true men to do all manner of thing what they be desired to do in safeguard or inforcing of the said place , and moreover they be proved men, and cunning in war and feats of arms, and they can well shoot both guns and cross-bows, and amend and string them, and devise bulwarks, or any things that should be a strength to the place, and they will as need is keep watch and ward, they be sad³ and well-advised men, saving one of them, which is bald, and called William Peny, which is as good a man as goeth upon earth saving a little,⁴ he will, as I understand, be a little

¹ Give content ² Hired ³ Serious ⁴ But for one thing

copschotyn¹, but yet he is no brawler but full of courtesy . ”

Many things that we look on as quite ordinary—sugar, for instance, and oranges—could not be bought in Norfolk, so, when any of the Paston men were in London they had to be commissioned to bring them back Margaret Paston wrote to her husband for a sugar loaf, dates and almonds —

“ Also I send you by the bearer hereof closed in this letter, five shillings of gold, and pray you to buy me a sugar-loaf, and dates, and almonds, and send it me home, and if ye beware² any more money, when ye come home I shall pay it to you again , the Holy Ghost keep you both, and deliver you of your enemies ”

Her wish for their safety was no mere form, but a genuine anxiety that they should not fall into the hands of robbers. There were no regular posts in those days Letters were sent by messengers attached to each household, and these servants were in great danger from the thieves who infested the roads Many of the Paston Letters end on this note of anxiety Sometimes it is for the masters themselves, although these generally rode with a company of their men, all well armed with swords and long or cross-bows Once, after “ many and great horrible robberies,” and a murder in which some local priests were concerned, Margaret Paston wrote, “ At the reverence of God beware how ye go and ride, for it is told me that ye be threatened of them that be naughty fellows ”

¹ Fond of drink ² Lay out

In another letter she tells of twenty marks (£13 6s 8d) which a friend had left at her house instead of sending to London, "for she dare not adventure her money to be brought up to London for fear of robbing, for it is said here that there goeth many thieves betwixt this and London"

Epidemics were as grave a danger as thieves. Sir John wrote home one day, "in haste" —

"Item, I pray you send me word if any of our friends or well-willers be dead, for I fear that there is great death in Norwich and in other borough towns in Norfolk . . .

"Wherefore, for God's sake, let my mother take heed to my young brethren that they be not in none place where that sickness is reigning, nor that they disport not with none other young people which resorteth where any sickness is . . . let my mother rather remove her household into the country"

The young Pastons were sure to have many friends with whom, when there was no "sickness," they could "disport" The Pastons were on good terms with their neighbours, and interested in all their doings. The women especially write letters full of local news. This is from Agnes Paston to her son John —

"And as for tidings, Philip Berney is passed to God on Monday last past with the greatest pain that ever I saw man, and on Tuesday Sir John Heveningham yede¹ to his church and heard three masses, and came home again never merrier, and said to his wife that he would go say a little devotion in his garden, and then he would dine, and forthwith he felt a

¹ Went

fainting in his leg, and syyd¹ down, this was at nine of the clock, and he was dead ere noon ”

The Pastons had many influential friends. The most powerful of all was the great Earl of Warwick, the “king-maker” who put Edward IV on the throne, and who was killed, fighting against him, at the battle of Barnet in 1471. Only two of Warwick’s letters have been preserved. One of these was to a neighbour of the Pastons, asking for the loan of ten or twenty pounds—another proof of the scarcity of ready money in those days; the other was to John Paston, asking him to show “good will and favour” to his purchase of some land in his neighbourhood. The letter, which begins “Worshipful and my right trusty and well-beloved friend”, proves that the Pastons were of importance outside their own local circle of friends, for no ordinary country squire would have been addressed thus by the richest and most powerful man in the kingdom.

Once when the mayor and mayoress of Norwich went to dine with Margaret Paston, they sent their own food for the dinner. This seems strange to us, but their hostess simply says —

“The mayor and the mayoress sent hither their dinners this day, and John Damme came with them, and they dined here, I am beholden to them for they have sent to me divers times² since ye yed³ hence, the mayor saith that there is no gentleman in Norfolk that he would do more for than he would for you, if it lay in his power to do for you ”

¹ Sat ² Possibly she means “have sent their dinners” ³ Went

All these extracts, you will have noticed, are in modernised spelling. The reason for this is that the old spelling is apt to make the letters seem strange and half foreign, and that to change it takes away nothing essential from their character. The spelling of Chaucer, on the other hand, could not be modernised, for to do so would often alter the actual text and spoil the metre. Here is a final selection, in the original spelling, from a letter of Margaret Paston to her husband —

“ Ryghte woischipful husbande, I recomende mee to you, beseechyng you that ye be not displeased with me, tho my simplenesse causid you for to be displeased with mee. By my trothe yt is not my will to do nor say that which scholde cause you for to bee displeased, and if I have done (yt), I am sorry thereof and will amend yt whereof I beseech you to forgive mee, and that ye bear none heavynesse in your hearte against mee, for your displeasure scholde bee too heavy to mee to endure with ”

In the early days of English, spelling had not the importance it has for us. The Elizabethan writers spelled much as the fancy took them. Even proper names underwent surprising variations. We need not therefore feel any twinge of conscience at altering old spelling, especially as it often gives, for the modern reader, a quite false air of “ quaintness ” to the work so spelled, and puts it further away from us, instead of making it close and real and descriptive of people like ourselves.

CHAPTER III

SKELTON

JOHN SKELTON was born probably in 1460, and was the next poet of any modern interest after Chaucer. He was a clergyman and a courtier whose poems had not a good word for Church or Court; a vigorous and clever man, downright, vain, quarrelsome, and often abusive, but very popular. The best proof of his popularity, and of his courage, is that he wrote satires against the all-powerful Cardinal Wolsey, and that nothing happened to him. There were no laws of libel for him to break, but men who criticised those in power were in danger of losing their lives. Skelton was the only man in England who dared to say what he thought of Wolsey. He called him, among other things, "the butcher's dog."

Skelton always insisted that he should be addressed as "poet laureate." This did not mean that he was the official national poet, as Mr. Masfield is to-day. It meant that he had earned a garland of laurel by taking a degree in grammar, which he did at the three universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Louvain. He must have been highly thought of at Court, for he was made tutor to the young Prince Henry, who was afterwards Henry VIII. Some time later he took holy orders, and then became rector of Diss, in Norfolk, where he seems to have been as lively as ever, for he "was esteemed more fit for the stage than the pew or

pulpit " Little is known of his later life, except that he came up against Wolsey, which is hardly surprising, and that in 1523 he had to take sanctuary from him at Westminster

Skelton wrote many different kinds of poems, some charming, some amusing, some dull, and some furiously satirical. He admired Chaucer greatly, and, like Chaucer and the other poets of the Middle Ages, he wrote delightfully about birds and flowers and young girls. *Philip Sparrow* is the lament of Jane Scroupe for her dead bird.

*When I remember again
How my Philip was slain,
Never half the pain
Was between you twain,
Pyramus and Thisbe,¹
As then befell to me
I wept and I wailed,
My tears down hailed,
But nothing it availed,
To call Philip again
Whom Gib, our cat, hath slain*

Jane calls on all the birds to come to Philip's funeral

*Lauda, anima mea, Dominum²
To weep with me, look that ye come,
All manner of birdes in your kind,
See none be left behind*

¹ A pair of famous and ill-starred Babylonian lovers ² Praise the Lord, O my soul !

*To mourning look that ye fall
 With dolorous songs funerall,
 Some to sing, and some to say,
 Some to weep, and some to pray,
 Every bird in his lay
 The goldfinch, the wagtail ;
 The jangling jay to rail,
 The flecked pie to chatter
 Of this dolorous matter ,
 And robin redbreast,
 He shall be the priest
 The requiem mass to sing,
 Softly warbeling,
 With help of the reed sparrow,
 And the chattering swallow,
 This hearse for to hallow ,
 The lark with his long toe ,
 The spinke¹ and the martinet² also ,
 The shoveller with his broad beak ,
 The dotterel, that foolish peke,³
 And also the mad coot,
 With bald face to toot ⁴
 The lusty chanting nightingale ,
 The popinjay⁵ to tell her tale,
 That toteth⁶ oft in a glass,
 Shall read the Gospel at mass ,
 The mavis⁷ with her whistle
 Shall read there the Epistle
 But with a large and a long
 To keep just plain-song
 Our chanters shall be the cuckoo,*

¹ Chaffinch ² Martin ³ Wretch ⁴ Peep about ⁵ Parrot
⁶ Peeps ⁷ Song-thrush

*The culver,¹ the stockdoo,²
 With "peewit" the lapwing,
 The Versicles shall sing*

This curious, short-lined verse is Skelton's most characteristic rhythm, and he uses it alike for quiet poems and for noisy ones. One of his liveliest poems, *The Tunning³ of Elnor Rummung*, is in this metre. Elnor Rummung kept a disreputable inn "beside Leatherhead," and all kinds of women gathered there to drink her ale.

*Come who so will
 To Elnor on the hill
 With "Fill the cup, fill!"
 And sit there by still,
 Early and late
 Thither cometh Kate,
 Cisy, and Sare,
 With their legs bare.
 With titters and tatters,
 Bring dishes and platters,
 With all their might running
 To have of her tunning*

He uses the same short line in *Colyn Clout*, his satire against the priests. He is hinting at Wolsey, "so bold and so bragging, and was so basely born," when he says :

*And where the prelates be
 Come of low degree,*

¹ Ring-dove ² Stock-dove ³ Decanting of ale from tuns (barrels)

*And set in majestie
 And spiritual dignitie,
 Farewell benigntie,
 Farewell simplicitie,
 Farewell humilitie,
 Farewell good charitie*

Why Come Ye Not to Court was the poem which really got him into trouble with Wolsey, and it is no wonder. Wolsey had far more good points than Skelton would admit but villain or no villain, butcher's son or prince, he was not likely to stand this kind of thing .

*But this mad Amaleck,
 Like to a Mamelek,¹
 He regardeth lords
 No more than potshords '
 He is in such elation
 Of his exaltation,
 And the supportation
 Of our Sovereign Lord,
 That, God to record,
 He ruleth all at will
 Without reason or skill '
 Howbeit, the primordial²
 Of his wretched original,
 And his base progeny,
 And his greasy genealogy,
 He came of the sang³ royall
 That was cast out of a butcher's stall.*

¹ *Mameluke* one of the famous Egyptian warriors This is not put in just as a good rhyme It was a topical reference which must have pleased Skelton's readers, for just about this time the Mamelukes, who had made themselves Sultans of Egypt, were overthrown.

² First origin ³ Blood

Skelton was good at this sort of personal insult, though he himself did not welcome it from other people. He and Christopher Garnesche, Chamberlain to Henry VIII, had a long wordy warfare, partly because Henry was amused by their angry cursings and partly because they really were angry. This is an extract from Skelton's contribution .

*When ye were younger of age
Ye were a kitchen-page,
A dish-washer, a drivell,¹
In the pot your nose did snwvell ,
Ye fried and ye broiled,
Ye roasted, and ye boiled,
Ye roasted, like a fon,²
A goose with the feet upon ,
Ye sluffered³ up souce⁴
In my Lady Brewes's house
Whereto should I write
Of such a greasy knight ?
A bawdy dish-clout
That bringeth the world about
With hafting⁵ and with polling,⁶
With lying and controlling*

These "tattered and jagged" rhymes, as Skelton called them, were immensely popular with the man in the street. "Many of them," an anonymous writer has said, "were never committed to print, but learned by heart by hundreds, repeated in the roadside alehouse or at the market-cross on fair days, when dealer and

¹ Drudge² Fool.³ Gobbled up noisily⁴ Tripe⁵ Lying⁶ Deceiving

customer left booth and stall vacant to push into the crowd hedging round the itinerant ballad-singer ”

Skelton's poetry was slightly old-fashioned when he wrote it ; the up-to-date poets were turning out quite different work, copied chiefly from Italian models But Skelton was not the man to mind being thought out of date. He enjoyed life, and went his own way His poetry was popular then, and it is still popular to-day, which is more than can be said for that of his contemporaries His originality, his sturdy, uncompromising character, and the outspoken vigour of his work make him the most noteworthy and likeable figure in a rather dull century of English literature.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENGLISH BIBLE

1

THE BIBLE as we know it, is a translation, the work of forty-seven men, published in 1611 This Authorised Version was sanctioned by James I himself, who took a great interest in its progress It was first talked of in 1604 James had not been long in England when he called a Conference at Hampton Court Palace to discuss "things pretended¹ to be amiss in the church," and among these things, it was soon agreed, was the lack of a good translation of the Bible There were other versions, but they did not satisfy everyone, and James arranged for a new one to be made by "the best learned in both the universities, after that to be reviewed by the bishops and chief learned of the Church, from them to be presented to the Privy Council, and lastly to be ratified by his royal authority, and so this whole Church to be bound into it and none other"

The forty-seven men thus chosen began their work in 1607, and finished it in two years and nine months They worked in six groups, two at Westminster, two at Oxford, and two at Cambridge and although there were so many different men at work on it, they achieved, not only a version so unified that it might be the work of one man, but the finest and most sustained work of all English prose

¹ Said

They were not the first translators, and they owed much to their predecessors. Three men especially have left their mark on the Authorised Version. These were Wyclif,¹ Tyndale, and Miles Coverdale. Wyclif's translation of the New Testament was made in 1380, in order, he said, to help his poor priests "faithfully to scatter the^s seeds of God's word." The English language then was very different from what it had become in 1611, but a comparison of the stories of the centurion's servant and of the Gadarene swine, as told by Wyclif and in the 1611 Bible, will show that the Authorised Version owed him some of its simplicity and straightforwardness.

Here are the two stories as we know them, from St Matthew VIII.

"And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home, sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the

¹ Founder of the Lollards

kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour .

“ And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God ? art thou come hither to torment us before the time ? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine And he said unto them, Go And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told everything, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts ”

The following is Wychf's translation The spelling in these extracts has not been modernised, as their particular interest is to show the difference in *language* between the fourteenth- and sixteenth-century versions and our own

“ Sothely when he hadde entride in to Capharnaum, centurio neigde¹ to hym, preyinge hym, And said,

¹ Drew near

Lord, my child lyeth in the hous sike on the palsie, and is yuel¹ tourmentid And Jhesus saith to hym, I shal cume, and shal hele hym And centurio answeyng saith to hym, Lord, I am not worthi, that thou entre vndir my roof, but oonly say thi word, and my child shall be helid. For whi and I am a man ordeynd vnder power, hauynge vnder me knigtis; and I say to this, Go, and he goth; and to another, Come thou, and he cometh; and to my seruant, Do thou this thing, and he doth. Sothely Jhesus, heerynge these thingis, wondride, and saide to men suyng² him Trewly I say to you I fond nat so greete feith in Ysrael Sothely Y say to you, that manye shulen³ come fro the est and west, and shulen rest with Abraham and Ysaac and Jacob in the kyngdam of heunes, forsothe the sonys of the rewme⁴ shulen be cast out into vtremest derknessis, there shal be weepyng, and beetyng togidre of teeth And Jhesus saide to centurio, Go; and as thou hast bileeued be it don to thee And the child was helid fro that houre . . .

“ And whan Jhesus hadde comen over the water in to the cuntre of men of Genazereth twey men hauynge deuels runnen to hym, goynge out fro biriebs,⁵ ful feerse, or *wikkid*, so that no man migte passe by that wey. And loo ! thei crieden, sayinge, What to us and to thee, Jhesus the sone of God ? hast thou comen hyder before the tyme for to tormente us ? Sothely a floc, or *droue*, of many hoggis lesewynge⁶ was nat fer from hem But the deuels preyeden him, seyng, Gif thou castest out us hennes, sende us into the droue of hoggis And he saith to hem, Go yee And thei

¹ Evil ² Following ³ Shall ⁴ Kingdom ⁵ Tombs ⁶ Feeding.

goynge out wente in to the hoggis ,¹ and loo¹ in a great bire¹ al the droue wente heedlynge² into the see, and thei ben dead in watris Forsothe the hurdes fledden away, and cummynge in to the citee, tolden alle these thingis ; and of hem that haddenthe fendis³ And loo¹ Al the citee wente agenis Jhesu, metynge hym , and hym seen, thei preiden *hym*, that he shulde pass fro her coostis."

William Tyndale made his translation in 1526 It was not safe for him to do it in England, so he went abroad, and the three thousand copies of his New Testament, which was the first English version ever to be printed, were published at Worms, in Germany His translation was popular, as he hoped it would be " If God spare my life," he said one day to a fellow-priest who had annoyed him, " ere many years I will cause (that) a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost " His language is much easier to read than Wyclif's, and much nearer to the Authorised Version " Wepinge and gnasshing of tethe," for example is one of the many happy phrases which James I's translators were wise enough to keep

" When Jesus was entred in to Capernaum, there cam vnto him a certayne Centurion., besechyng him And saynge Master, my servaunt lyeth sicke att home off the palsy, and is greuously payned And Jesus sayd vnto him I will come and cure him. The Centurion answered and saide Syr I am not worthy that thou shuldest com vnder the rofe of my housse, but speake the woide only and my servaunt shalbe healed For y also my selfe am a man vndre power, and have sowdeer⁴ vndre me, and y saye to one, go and he

¹ Speed ² Headlong ³ Devils ⁴ Soldiers

goeth and to anoðhre, come, and he cometh and to my servaunt, do this, and he doeth it When Jesus herde these saynges he marveyled, and said to them that folowed him Verely y say vnto you, I have not founde so great fayth no. not in Israell I say therfore vnto you, that many shall come from the eest and weest, and shall rest with Abraham, Ysaac and Jacob, in the kyngdom of heven And the children of the kingdom shalbe cast out in to the vtmoose dercknes, there shalbe wepinge and gnasshing of tethe Then Jesus said vnto the Centurion, go thy waye, and as thou hast believed so be it vnto the And his servaunt was healed that same houre .

“ And when he was come to the other syde, in to the countre off the gergesens, there met him two possessed of devylls, which cam out of the graves, and were out of measure fearce, so that no man might go by that way And lo they cryed out saynge O Jesu the sonne off God, what have we to do with the ? Art thou come hythei to torment us before the tyme (be come) ? There was a good waye off from them a greate heerd of swyne fedinge Then the devyls besought him saynge . if thou cast us out, suffre us to go oure way into the heerd of swyne. And he said unto them : go youre wayes then went they out, and departed into the heerd of swyne And lo ' all the heerd of swyne was caryed with violence hedlinge into the see, and perissshed in the water. Then the heerdmen fled, and went there ways into the cite, and tolde every thyng and what had fortunued unto them that were possessed of the devyls And lo, all the cite cam out, and met Jesus, and when they sawe him they besought him to depart out off there costes ”

2

The unity of style which makes the Authorised Version so remarkable was due not to Wyclif or to Tyndale, but to Miles Coverdale Coverdale " revised " the version of his friend Tyndale, and in so doing produced a new and characteristic translation, smoother, more careful, and of a much finer style His version of the psalms is still printed in the Prayer Book, because it is the best for singing His Bible, which was the first *complete* English printed Bible, came out in 1535, only nine years after Tyndale's This is his version of the same passage from St Matthew

" When Jesus was entred in Capernaum, ther cam unto hym a captayn, and besought hym, saying : Syr, my servant lieth sick at home of the palsy, and is greuously payned Jesus sayde unto hym I wyll come and heale hym The capitayne answered and sayd · Sir, I am not worthy, that thou shouldest comme under my roofe, but speake the word only, and my servant shall be healed For I myself am also a man subjecte to the authoritee of an other, and have souldiours under me Yet when I saze to one go, he goeth and to an other · come, he commeth and to my servant : doo this, he dooth it Whan Jesus herd that, he meruailed, and sayd to them that folowed hym : veryly I saye unto you · I have not founde so great fayth, no not in Israell But I say unto you, Many shall come from the east and west, and shall rest with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kyngdome of heaven, and the children of the kyngdom shall be caste out into bitter darknesse · there shalbe

wepying and gnashyng of teeth And Jesus sayde unto the capitayne . Go thy waie, and as thou beleuest, so be it unto the And his servant was healed the same houre

“ And whan he was come to the other syde into the countrey of the Gergesites, there mette hym two possessed of dēvylys, whyche came out of the graues, and were out of mesure ferce, so that no man might go by that waie And beholde, they cryed out, saying Oh Jesu, thou sonne of God what have we to doo with the ? Art thou come hither to torment us before the tyme to come ? And there was a good waye of from theym a greate hearde of swyne feedyng Than the dyvels besoughte hym sayenge If thou cast us out, suffre us to go oure waye into the hearde of swyne And he sayd unto them . go youre waies. Than wente they oute, and departed into the hearde of swyne And beholde, the whole hearde of swine was caried with violence headlyng into the sea, and peryshed in the water Then the herdemen fled, and wente their wayes into the citee, and tolde euery thying, and what had fortunèd unto the possessed of the deuilles And beholde all the citee came out, and met Jesus, and whan they sawe hym, they besought hym, for to departe out of their coastes ”

All these versions of the Bible were “ modern ” to the men and women who read them. They were written in the ordinary, colloquial language of the day as it was spoken in the streets and palaces and at home We have modern translations to-day also. Here is Dr. Moffatt’s rendering of the two stories from St Matthew in the language we use to-day

“ When he entered Capharnahum an army captain came up to him and appealed to him, saying, ‘ Sir, my servant is lying ill at home with paralysis, in terrible agony ’ He replied, ‘ I will come and heal him ’ The Captain answered, ‘ Sir, I am not fit to have you under my roof, only say the word, and my servant will be cured For though I am a man under authority myself, I have soldiers under me, I tell one man to go, and he goes, I tell another to come, and he comes, I tell my servant, “ Do this,” and he does it ’ When Jesus heard that, he marvelled, ‘ I tell you truly,’ he said to his followers, ‘ I have never met faith like this anywhere in Israel Many, I tell you, will come *from east and west* and take their places beside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Realm of heaven, while the sons of the Realm will pass outside, into the darkness; there men will wail and gnash their teeth ’ Then Jesus said to the captain, ‘ Go, as you have had faith your prayer is granted ’ And the servant was cured at that very hour

“ When he reached the opposite side, the country of the Gadarenes, he was met by two demoniacs who ran out of the tombs, they were so violent that nobody could pass along the road there They shrieked, ‘ Son of God, what business have you with us? Have you come here to torture us before it is time? ’ Now, some distance away, there was a large drove of swine grazing, so the demons begged him saying, ‘ If you are going to cast us out, send us into that drove of swine ’ He said to them, ‘ Begone! ’ So out they came and went to the swine, and the entire drove rushed down the steep slope into the sea and perished in the water

The herdsmen fled, they went off to the town and reported the whole affair of the demoniacs. Then all the town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him to move out of their district."

Dr Moffatt's version is valuable, as it makes us realise the direct and vivid narrative of the Bible, and the power and interest which have made it seem worth translating into English as long as there have been any English people to read it. But no translation can replace the Authorised Version. Those forty-seven men, with the help of the dead Wyclif and Tyndale and Coverdale, made a book whose inspiration has lasted, and will last, through the centuries, and which was not only the beginning and example of all great English prose, but greater and more magnificent prose itself than anything which it has since inspired.

Ecclesiastes XII 1-7

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them,

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.

In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the

voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low ,

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it

CHAPTER V

THE RENAISSANCE

1

IN 1453, the Turks took Constantinople. In 1492, Columbus discovered America. In 1543, a Pole called Copernicus published a book proving that the earth moved round the sun. These three events may seem to have nothing to do with each other, and still less to do with England ; but without them and all that they implied we should not have had the work of Shakespeare and Spenser, of Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and the other writers of the most splendid half-century in English Literature. We should not have had the Renaissance.

The Renaissance is often thought of as the New Learning. When the Turks took Constantinople, numbers of Greek scholars were forced to leave the city. They scattered to different towns all over Europe, and, wherever they settled, the love and knowledge of Greek were revived, and thus, in various ways, Greek literature and philosophy began their immense influence on all modern literature and life.

But all that happened at the Renaissance did not happen in the mind. The exploration of new learning was paralleled by the exploration of new countries. Columbus was only one of many explorers. Drake, Frobisher, Raleigh, and the other seamen-adventurers of Elizabeth's reign opened up new continents and new seas, and fired men's minds with the hitherto

unsuspected possibilities and greatness of the world they lived in. Copernicus also had his share in this. Before he published his book, men thought that the earth was the centre of the universe, fixed, created entirely for their own delight and comfort. They now learned that they were not as important as they had thought, and that the whole universe did not revolve round them, but they found, which was far more exciting, that they were part of a magnificently ordered solar system.

So many new horizons were opening up, in learning and invention, in exploration and science, in literature and ideas, that the men and women in Elizabeth's reign had much to think about, and even more to do. It was an age of action as well as of great literature. Men lived more fully than they had realised was possible. Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, was not only an explorer, but a courtier, a historian, and a poet, and this all-round ability and many-sided interest was typical of English men and English society at the time which we call the Renaissance.

Before this time, English society was still semi-barbarous, and even now, when great heights of culture were reached, the old barbarism was by no means left behind. For a graphic picture we may turn to *Shakespeare's Predecessors*, by John Addington Symonds :

"The English then, as now, were great travellers. Young men, not merely of the noble classes, visited the South and returned with the arts, accomplishments, and follies of Italian capitals. But the core of the nation remained sound and wholesome. Nor was the culture which the English borrowed from less unsophisticated nations more than superficial. The

incidents of Court gossip show how savage was the life beneath Queen Elizabeth spat, in the presence of her nobles, at a gentleman who had displeased her, struck Essex on the cheek, drove Burleigh blubbing from her apartment. Men and women who read Plato, or discussed the elegancies of Petrarch, suffered brutal practical jokes, relished the obscenities of jesters, used the grossest language of the people. Carrying farms and acres on their backs in the shape of costly silks and laces, they lay upon rushes filthy with the vomit of old banquets. Glittering in suits of gilt and jewelled mail, they jostled with town-porters in the stench of the bear gardens, or the bloody bull-pit. The Church itself was not respected. The nave of old St Paul's became a rendezvous for thieves. Fine gentlemen paid fees for the privilege of clanking up and down its aisles in service-time. It is difficult, even by noting an infinity of such characteristics, to paint the many-coloured incongruities of England at that epoch. Yet in the midst of this confusion rose cavaliers like Sidney, philosophers like Bacon, poets like Spenser, men in whom all that is pure, elevated, subtle, tender, strong, wise, delicate, and learned in our modern civilisation displayed itself. And the masses of the people were still in harmony with these high strains."

Queen Elizabeth herself shows these typical "many-coloured incongruities." Although capable of the behaviour recorded above, she was a great queen, and no mean scholar. Roger Ascham, who was her tutor, writes with real admiration of "our most noble Queen Elizabeth," who by working at Latin and Greek—

“daily without missing every forenoon, for the space of a year or two, hath attained to such a perfect understanding in both tongues, and to such a ready utterance of the Latin, and that with such a judgment, as they be few in number in both the universities, or elsewhere in England, that be, in both tongues, comparable with her Majesty ”

Roger Ascham was a kind and encouraging tutor in an age when men still believed that children should be driven, or even flogged, into wisdom. In 1570 he published a book called the *Schoolmaster*, upholding his ideas on education and one of the best stories he tells is of how he found the unfortunate young Lady Jane Grey reading Plato in her room in preference to going hunting with her family.

“And one example, whether love or fear doth work more in a child, for virtue and learning, I will gladly report which may be heard with some pleasure, and followed with more profit. Before I went into Germany, I came to Brodegate in Leicestershire, to take my leave of that noble Lady Jane Grey, to whom I was exceeding much beholden. Her parents, the Duke and Duchess, with all the household, Gentlemen and Gentlewomen, were hunting in the Park. I found her, in her Chamber, reading *Phaedon* Platonis¹ in Greek, and that with as much delight, as some gentlemen would read a merry tale in Boccaccio². After salutation, and duty done, with some other talk, I asked her why she would leave such pastime in the Park? Smiling she answered me. Indeed, all their sport in the Park is but a shadow to that pleasure that I find

¹ Plato's dialogue, *Phaedo* ² See p (15)

in Plato Alas goodd folk, they never felt, what true pleasure meant And how came you Madam, quoth I, to this deep knowledge of pleasure, and what did chiefly allure you into it since, not many women, but very few men had attained thereunto I will tell you, quoth she, and will tell you a truth, which perchance you will marvel at. One of the greatest benefits, that ever God gave me, is, that he sent me so sharp and sour Parents, and so gentle a schoolmaster For when I am in the presence either of father or mother, whether I speak, keep silence, sit, stand, or go, eat, drink, be merry, or sad, be sewing, playing, dancing, or doing anything else, I must do it, as it were, in such weight, measure, and number, even so perfectly, as God made the world, or else I am so sharply taunted, so cruelly threatened, yes presently some times, with pinches, nips, and bobs, and other ways, which I will not name, for the honour I bear them, so without measure misordered, that I think myself in hell, till time come, that I must go to M Elmer, who teaches me so gently, so pleasantly, with such fair allurements to learning, that I think all the time nothing,¹ while I am with him And when I am called from him, I fall on weeping, because, whatsoever I do else, but learning, is full of grief, trouble, fear, and whole mishiking unto me And thus my book has been so much my pleasure, and brings daily to me more pleasure and more, that in respect of it, all other pleasures, in very deed, be but trifles and troubles unto me I remember this talk gladly, both because it is so worthy of memory, and because also, it was the last talk that ever I had, and the last time that ever I saw that noble and worthy Lady ”

¹ The time seems to go by in a flash

Ascham's interest in education was typical of the Renaissance. Men and women then were deeply concerned to live the fullest and best lives possible, and they saw that, to do this properly, they must be taught the way when they were children. The subject was much discussed, at Court and at supper-tables and in schools, and many books besides Ascham's were written. One thing was agreed by everyone. Latin and Greek were not everything, but games, music, literature, politics, and good manners were just as necessary to make good men and women. Ascham puts it in his usual friendly way

"And I do not mean, by all this talk, that young Gentlemen should always be poring on a book, and by using good studies should lease¹ honest pleasure and haunt no good pastime, I mean nothing less for it is well known, that I both like and love, and have always, and do yet still use, all exercises and pastimes that be fit for my nature and ability.

"Therefore, I would wish, that, beside some good time, fitly appointed and constantly kept, to increase by reading the knowledge of the tongues and learning, young gentlemen should use and delight in all Courtly exercises and Gentlemanlike pastimes."

He goes on to enumerate these exercises and pastimes and though he wrote nearly four centuries ago, we find tennis, swimming, and dancing among them.

"Therefore to ride comely², to run fair at the tilt or ring to play at all weapons to shoot fair in³ bow, or

¹ Lose ² Well ³ With the

surely in gun to vault lustily to run to leap to wrestle to swim to dance comely to sing, and play of instruments cunningly to hawk to hunt . to play at tennis¹ be not only comely and decent, but also very necessary, for a Courtly Gentleman to use ”

Sir Thomas Elyot, in a book written forty years before Ascham's, gives much the same list of necessary pastimes He refuses to add football, which, he says, “is to be put in perpetual silence,” being “nothing but beastly fury and extreme violence.”

In two words, the Elizabethan ideal, both of education and of right living, was Arms and Letters Soldiers were poets, and poets good fighters—as witness, for example, Sir Philip Sidney—and soldiers and poets and other people tried to be courteous and to take an interest in and enjoy as many aspects of life as possible The idea of Arms and Letters came from Italy, where the Renaissance had begun long before it began in England It came largely through an excellent book called *The Courtier*, written by an Italian named Castiglione, and read by everyone at Elizabeth's Court Castiglione, like these Englishmen who followed him, wished “to ioyne learning with cumlie exercise,” and he wrote so well that Dr Johnson, two hundred years later, spoke with high approval of “the best book that ever was written upon good breeding, *Il Cortegiano* by Castiglione ”

2

Men like Sir Walter Raleigh and Sidney—and there were many such—prove that these ideals were not

¹ Not lawn-tennis, but the indoor game

vain All the Elizabethan writers show the new spirit, the enormous vigour and enthusiasm for life which came with the Renaissance. It shines most clearly in the drama ; in the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe, of Kyd and Ben Jonson, of Dekker and Beaumont and Fletcher, to name only the chief of the great company of Elizabethan dramatists. The theatre was extremely popular with all kinds of people, and these magnificent plays were acted to audiences who thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated them

Theatre-going then was not what it is to-day, although the theatres had names much like those in London now the Globe, for instance, the Fortune, the Curtain, and the Swan For one thing, the theatres were in the suburbs instead of the centre of the town, for, much as everybody from the Queen downwards enjoyed plays, the city authorities disapproved, and would not allow public theatres within the city walls Another difference was that the plays were acted in broad daylight, and in a theatre almost entirely open to the sky The stage projected a long way into the uncovered pit, and the audience stood on three sides of it while the play was going on All round the walls were galleries and boxes ; the theatre suggested the courtyard of some great inn, with people looking down from the windows. The Elizabethan theatres were in fact modelled on the inn-yards, for it was there that the companies used to act before they rose to the dignity of the theatres

There was no curtain the actors walked on, and walked off when they had finished, through three doors at the back of the stage There was very little scenery indoor scenes could be acted in a little

curtained recess, and balcony scenes, or those on castle walls, upon a gallery just above it. The audience was willing to take its part in the make-believe, and would see, on that high, square, sunlit stage, the midnight terrors or the rich banqueting hall that the actors talked about, but this absence of scenery, curtains, lighting or any kind of illusion threw a heavy responsibility upon the playwright and the actors. They had so little to help them. A further difficulty, from the modern realistic point of view, was that it was considered improper for women to act, and all the women's parts had therefore to be taken by boys. This in part explains the readiness with which the heroines in Shakespeare's plays, and so many others of the time, change into boy's clothes.

John Addington Symonds, in the book already quoted, gives a lively description of the crowds that gathered to see a new tragedy at the Fortune in Finsbury Park

"The flag is flying from the roof. The drums have been beaten, and the trumpets are sounding for the second time. It is three o'clock upon an afternoon of summer. We pass through the great door, ascend some steps, take our key from the pocket of our trunk-hose, and let ourselves into our private room upon the first or lowest tier. We find ourselves in a low building, open to the slanting sunlight, built of shabby wood, not unlike a circus, smelling of sawdust and the breath of people. The yard below is crowded with "sixpenny mechanics," and prentices in greasy leathern jerkins, servants in blue frieze with their masters' badges on their shoulders, boys and grooms, elbowing each

other for bare standing ground and passing coarse jests on their neighbours. A similar crowd is in the twopenny room above our heads, except that here are a few flaunting girls. Not many women of respectability are visible, though two or three have taken a side-box, from which they lean forward to exchange remarks with the gallants on the stage. Five or six young men are already seated there before the curtain, playing cards and cracking nuts to while away the time. A boy goes up and down among them, offering various qualities of tobacco for sale, and furnishing lights for the smokers.¹ The stage itself is strewn with rushes, and from the jutting tiled roof of the shadow,² supported by a couple of stout wooden pillars, carved into satyrs at the top, hangs a curtain of tawny-coloured silk. This is drawn when the trumpets have sounded for the third time, and an actor in a black velvet mantle, with a crown of bays upon his flowing wig, struts forward bowing to the audience for attention. He is the Prologue. He has barely broken into the jogtrot of his declamation, when a bustle is heard behind, and a fine fellow comes shouldering past him from the dice-room followed by a mincing page.

“ ‘ A stool, boy ! ’ cries our courtier, flinging off his cloak and displaying a doublet of white satin and hose of blue silk. The Prologue has to stand aside, and falters in his speech. The groundlings hiss, groan, mew like cats, and howl out, ‘ Filthy ! filthy ! ’ It may also happen that an apple is flung upon the stage, to notify the people’s disapproval of this interruption.

¹ Tobacco-smoking was the latest extravagance of the day. It was said to have been brought from Virginia by Sir Walter Raleigh.

² The slanting roof over the stage.

Undisturbed by these discourtesies, however, the new comer twirls his moustachios, fingers his sword-hilt, and nods to his acquaintance. After compliments to the gentlemen already seated, the gallant at last disposes himself in a convenient place of observation, and the Prologue ends "

When we come to the plays of Shakespeare, Marlowe and the rest, we have to remember that it was for such theatres and such audiences that they were written, and that much that seems to us strange, or even absurd, when we think of our own theatres, was natural and necessary at the time.

The life of Elizabethan England is like nothing so much as a crazy quilt, sewn together of every sort of material. It is bright, it is lively, it catches the eye. Some of the patches are costly and beautiful, others are tarnished or threadbare, and a few are frankly dirty. No general survey of the time can be given in a short space. It can only be represented by an apparently haphazard collection of scraps and pictures, such as this chapter.

CHAPTER VI

SPENSER

1

VERY FEW details are known about Spenser's life, and most of these have to be inferred from obscure remarks about himself in his own poetry. He is often mentioned by Elizabethan writers, but their concern is to praise his work, not to write his biography. It says much for the many-sidedness of the Renaissance that men as unlike one another as Spenser, Shakespeare, and Marlowe should each be fully representative of its spirit. After the *Shepherd's Calendar* had appeared in 1579, and the first three books of the *Faerie Queene* in 1590, Spenser's fellow-poets recognised this new spirit in his work, and acclaimed him as their leader.

He has always made a special appeal to poets. He set out with deliberate care to change the style and the language of English poetry, and he succeeded. It is not only his vivid pictures in the *Faerie Queene* and the music of his words, however, that have earned him the name of "the poet's poet." He has fired men's imagination, as he himself was fired, by his enthusiasm for beauty and for all that we call "romance", for that poetry which is, as his friend Sidney put it, "compounded of the best and honourablest things."

Spenser was most probably born in 1552, in London. He was sent to the Merchant Taylor's School, where he had as headmaster the broad-minded Richard

Mulcaster, whose ideas on education were like those of Ascham. He was at Pembroke College, Cambridge, from 1569-76, and there began his friendship with the cross-grained pedant, Gabriel Harvey. Harvey's influence on Spenser was considerable, but not as great as he could have wished. He hated the *Faerie Queene*; which he indignantly called "Hobgoblin runne away with the garland from Apollo," and would have liked Spenser to write obscure, unrhymed, unmetrical verse. Fortunately, Spenser had too much sense to obey him.

After Cambridge, Spenser came to London and entered the household of the Earl of Leicester. He admired Leicester greatly, and he admired his nephew, Sir Philip Sidney, even more. Sidney appeared to Spenser, as he appears to us, the pattern of the perfect courtier. Spenser's love and respect for him influenced both his life and his poetry.

The *Shepherd's Calendar*, which appeared in 1579, is a work of great importance in the history of English poetry, and need not detain us. It contains twelve allegorical dialogues, one for each month of the year, and in these, with carefully thought-out vocabulary and metre, a number of simple shepherds discuss, among other things, politics and the state of the Church.

In the next year, Spenser seems to have offended Lord Leicester. At any rate, he was paid the doubtful honour of being sent away to Ireland, as private secretary to Lord Grey, the new Lord-Deputy. He hated going, and hated Ireland as a "savage soil" with savage inhabitants, but he lived there, except

for two short intervals in London, for the next eighteen years. In 1587 he was granted the manor and castle of Kilcolman, and 1589 he was made Clerk of the Council of Munster. Sir Walter Raleigh was also in Munster in 1589. He and Spenser soon became friends; Spenser showed him the MS. of the early part of the *Faerie Queene*, and Raleigh, immediately impressed, insisted that Spenser should bring the poem and return with him to London. He did so, and the first three books of the *Faerie Queene*, which was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, appeared in 1590 with instant success. Neither on this visit nor his next in 1595, however, could Spenser obtain the position at Court which he hoped for as a reward. He lived quietly at Kilcolman, happily married, and writing a great deal of poetry. In 1598 disaster came upon him. Munster rose in rebellion, and Spenser's home was sacked and burnt. He and his family fled to Cork, and from there he set out on a last journey to London in December of that year. He died suddenly at Westminster in January 1599.

Spenser was described by Aubrey the biographer as "a little man, who wore short hair, little bands, and little cuffs." This is not much to go on, and though we can add that he was delicate, sensitive, and fastidious, we can never know as much of Spenser the man as we know of Spenser the poet. He has left several autobiographical poems, but the chief thing these reveal is his inveterate habit of describing events and people in the disguise of allegory. In *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, he tells the story of himself and Raleigh and his introduction to Queen Elizabeth. He is Colin, Raleigh the Shepherd of the Ocean, and Elizabeth is

Cynthia the Lady¹ of the Sea. The tale is charming, but fantastic

*One day (quoth he) I sat (as was my trade)
Under the foot of Mole, that mountain hoar,
Keeping my sheep amongst the cooly shade
Of the green alders by the Mulla's shore¹
There a strange shepherd chanced to find me out . .
Whom when I asked from what place he came,
And how he hight,² himself he did ycleepe³
The Shepherd of the Ocean⁴ by name,
And said he came far from the main-sea deep,
He, sitting me beside in that same shade,
Provoked me to play some pleasant fit⁵,
And when he heard the music which I made,
He found himself full greatly pleased at it . .*

Colin and the Shepherd cross the sea in a great ship "dancing upon the waters back to land," and come to Cynthia's court.

*The Shepherd of the Ocean (quoth he)
Unto that Goddess' grace me first enhanced,
And to mine oaten pipe inclined her ear,
That she thenceforth therein gan take delight ;
And it desired at timely hours to hear,
All⁶ were my notes but rude and roughly dight⁷,
Why ? (said Alexis⁸ then) what needeth she
That is so great a shepherdess herself,
And hath so many shepherds in her fee,
To hear thee sing, a simple silly Elf ?*

¹ Spenser is recalling his own estate of Kilcolman, to which he became deeply attached ² Was called ³ Call Spenser used archaisms such as this for deliberate effect, but in this case he has understood the word wrongly and has used an old past participle as a present ⁴ Scan as three syllables ⁵ Section of a poem Spenser is referring, of course, to the *Faerie Queene* ⁶ Although ⁷ Adorned
⁸ One of the group to whom 'Colin' was telling his tale

This affected simplicity of Spenser's was dangerous, and it says much for his sincerity and ability that he carried it through successfully in so many poems. Actually, there was nothing simple or rustic about him. He was, like most of his friends, a believer in the ideals of Castiglione, and was an excellent scholar and an accomplished courtier. That he knew how to flatter Elizabeth (an essential matter), the above extract will prove. He hated the evils of the Court more bitterly than most men, and in *Mother Hubbard's Tale* he said, under cover of allegory, exactly what he thought of them.

A Fox and an Ape, starving after various misadventures, were advised by a prosperous Mule to go to Court and make their fortunes. They made crafty preparations —

*So well they shifted, that the Ape anon
Himself had clothed like a Gentleman,
And the sly Fox, as like to be his groom,
That to the Court in seemly sort they come,
Where the fond Ape, himself uprearing high
Upon his hiptoes, stalketh stately by,
As if he were some great Magnifico,
And boldly doth among the boldest go,
And his man Reynold, with fine counterfesance¹
Supports his credit and his countenance
Then gan the Courtiers gaze on every side,
And stare on him, with big looks basen wide,²
Wondering what mister wight³ he was, and whence.*

¹ Counterfeiting, acting ² Widely extended, i.e. with stares of astonishment ³ What sort of creature

They were persuaded into believing him a fine gentleman, and Spenser describes his adventures at Court with great scorn for a place where such things could be tolerated. The bitterest outburst in all Spenser's poetry comes in *Mother Hubbard's Tale*. Reading it, we remember that he himself had three times "sued" for preferment at Court, and each time been disappointed.

*Full little knowest thou, that hast not tried,
 What hell it is in sueing long to bide
 To lose good days, that might be better spent ,
 To waste long nights in pensive discontent ,
 To speed to-day, to be put back to-morrow ,
 To feed on hope, to pine with fear and sorrow ,
 To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares ,
 To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs ,
 To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,
 To spend, to give, to want, to be undone
 Unhappy wight, born to disastrous end,
 That doth his life in so long 'tendence spend !
 Who ever leaves sweet home, where mean estate
 In safe assurance, without strife or hate,
 Finds all things needful for contentment meek,
 And will to Court for shadows vain to seek,
 Or hope to gain, himself will a daw try¹
 That curse God send unto mine enemy*

2

The six books of the *Faerie Queene* tell the adventures of six good knights, servants of Queen Gloriana, among the fair ladies, dragons, and monsters of Fairyland. Like Spenser's other long poems, the

¹ Prove a jackdaw, a fool

Faerie Queene is an allegory. It is hardly too much to say that Spenser thought in allegory and when he came, like so many of his contemporaries, to consider the Renaissance idea of a gentleman and, as he said, "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline," it was most natural for him to see the necessary virtues personified as knights. So the Red Cross Knight of Book I represents Holiness, Sir Guyon of Book II is Temperance. Sir Calidore, another knight, represents not only Courtesy, but Sir Philip Sidney, for Spenser happily complicated his story even further by bringing in real people at the Court of Gloriana, who was, of course, Elizabeth.

Fortunately, the story is thoroughly enjoyable without any reference to abstract virtues or dead-and-gone Court scandals. We gather, for instance, from various remarks, that Spenser hated disorder of any kind, and chiefly admired a well-ordered life and a well-ordered state of society. When he brings any kind of monster into his knights' adventures, therefore, it is to represent disorder but we do not need to know this to enjoy the following description of the Dragon whom the Red Cross Knight slew after a long and terrible battle.

*With that they heard a roaring hideous sound,
That all the air with terror filled wide,
And seemed uneath¹ to shake the steadfast ground
Eftsoones that dreadful Dragon they espied,
Where stretched he lay upon the sunny side
Of a great hill, himself like a great hill
But, all so soon as he from far descried*

¹ Almost

*Those glastring arms that heaven with light did fill,
He roused himself full blithe, and hastened them until*

*His flaggy wings, when forth he did display,
Were like two sails, in which the hollow wind
Is gathered full, and worketh speedy way .
And eke the pennons,¹ that did his pinions bind,
Were like main-yards with flying canvas lined ,
With which whenas him list² the air to beat,
And there by force unwonted passage find,
The clouds before him fled for terror great,
And all the heavens stood still amazed with his threat*

*His huge long tail, wound up in hundred folds,
Does overspread his long brass-scaly back,
Whose wreathéd boughtes³ whenever he unfolds,
And thick entangled knots adown does slack,
Bespotted as with shields of red and black,
It sweepeth all the land behind him far,
And of three furlongs does but litle lack ,
And at the point two stings in fixed are,
Both deadly sharp, that sharpest steel exceeden far.*

*But stings and sharpest steel did far exceed
The sharpness of his cruel rending claws
Dead was it sure, as sure as death in deed,
What ever thing does touch his ravenous paws,
Or what within his reach he ever draws.
But his most hideous head my tongue to tell
Does tremble , for his deep devouring jaws
Wide gaped, like the grisly mouth of hell
Through which into his dark abyss all ravin⁴ fell . . .*

¹ Feathers ² Pleased ³ Folds ⁴ Plunder, prey

*His blazing eyes, like two bright shining shields,
 Did burn with wrath, and sparkled living fire
 As two broad Beacons, set in open fields,
 Send forth their flames far off to every shire,
 And warning give that enemies conspire
 With fire and sword the region to invade
 So flam'd his eyne¹ with rage and rancorous ire,
 But far within, as in a hollow glade,
 Those glaring lamps were set that made a dreadful shade*

*So dreadfully he towards him did pass,
 Forc'hting up a-loft his speckled breast,
 And often bounding on the bruised grass,
 As for great joyance of his newcome guest
 Eftsoones he gan advance his haughty crest,
 As chaffed² Boar his bristles doth uprear,
 And shook his scales to battle ready dressed,
 That made the Red Cross knight nigh quake for fear
 As bidding bold defiance to his foeman near*

There are naturally numbers of battles in this story of the war of Good against Evil. In them, and in any pageantry or description of the actual countryside of Fairyland (which often bears a striking resemblance to his Irish home), Spenser's powers of painting a vivid picture excel. Sir Guyon, the knight of Temperance, had his full share of adventures. This is our introduction to him and to his companion, the Palmer ---

*His carriage was full comely and upright,
 His countenance demure and temperate,
 But yet so stern and terrible in sight,
 That cheered his friends, and did his foes amate³*

¹ Eyes² Chafed, i.e. attacked³ Terrify.

*He was an Elfin born of noble state
 And mickle¹ worship in his native land ,
 Well could he tourney, and in lists debate,
 And knighthood took of good Sir Huon's hand,
 When with king Oberon he came to Fairyland*

*Him als² accompanied upon the way
 A comely Palmer, clad in black attire,
 Of ripest years, and harrs all hoary gray,
 That with a staff his feeble steps did stire,³
 Lest his long way his aged limbs should tire
 And, if by looks one may the mind aread,
 He seemed to be a sage and sober sire ,
 And ever with slow pace the knight did lead,
 Who taught his tramplng steed with equal steps to tread*

3

When Sir Guyon came to a Castle, " built on a rock adjoining to the seas," he found two knights quarrelling fiercely This is Spenser's account of the strange, three-cornered fight that ensued It is vivid and vigorous, but Spenser will not hurry , he will pause in the most exciting place to compare the knights to a bear and a tiger, or to bring in his favourite comparison of a ship in stormy seas

*But ere they could proceed unto the place
 Where he abode, themselves at discord fell,
 And cruel combat joined in middle space
 With horrible assault, and fury fell,
 They heaped huge strokes the scorned life to quell,
 That all on uproar from her settled seat,
 The house was raised, and all that in did dwell*

¹ Great ² Also ³ Steer

*Seemed that loud thunder with amazement great
Did rend the rattling skies with flames of floudring¹ heat*

*The nouse thereof called forth that stranger knight,
To weet² what dreadful thing was there in hond ,
Where whenas two brave knights in bloody fight
With deadly rancour he enraunged³ fond,⁴
His sunbroad shield about his wrist he bond,⁵
And shining blade unsheathed, with which he ran
Unto that stead,⁶ then strife to understond ,
And at his first arrvval them began
With goodly means to pacify, well as he can*

*But they, him spyng, both with greedy force
At once upon him ran, and him beset
With strokes of mortal steel without remorse,
And on his shield like iron sledges⁷ bet
As when a Bear and Tiger, being met
In cruel fight on Lybicke⁸ Ocean wide,
Espy a traveller with feet surbet,⁹
Whom they in equal prey hope to divide,
They stint¹⁰ their strife and him assail on every side*

*But he, not like a weary traveller,
Their sharp assault right boldly did rebut,
And suffered not their blows to bite him^{*} near,
But with redoubled buffes them back did put
Whose grieved minds, which choler¹¹ did englut,¹²
Against themselves turning their wrathful spite,
Gan with new rage their shields to hew and cut ,
But still, when Guyon came to part their fight,
With heavy load on him they freshly gan to smite*

¹ Thundering ² Know ³ Ranged in order ⁴ Found ⁵ Bound
⁶ Place ⁷ Sledge-hammers ⁸ African ⁹ Weary ¹⁰ Cease ¹¹ Anger
¹² Which were overwhelmed with anger

*As a tall ship tossed in troublous seas,
 Whom raging winds, threatening to make the prey
 Of the rough rocks, do diversely disease,¹
 Meets two contrary billows by the way,
 That her on either side do sore assay,
 And boast to swallow her in greedy grave,
 She, scorning both their spites, does make wide way
 And with her breast breaking the foamy wave,
 Does ride on both their backs, and fair herself doth
 save*

*So boldly he him bears, and rusheth forth
 Between them both by conduct of his blade
 Wondrous great prowess and heroic worth
 He showed that day, and rare ensample made,
 When two so mighty warriors he dismayed.
 At once he wards and strikes, he takes and pays,
 Now forced to yield, now forcing to invade,
 Before, behind, and round about him lays,
 So double was his pains, so double be his praise*

*Strange sort of fight, three valiant knights to see
 Three combats joyn in one, and to darraigne²
 A triple war with triple enmity,
 All for their Ladies' froward³ love to game,
 Which gotten was but hate ⁴ So love does reign
 In stoutest minds, and maketh monstrous war,
 He maketh war, he maketh peace again,
 And yet his peace is but continual jar.
 O miserable men that to him subject are ¹*

Later on, Guyon, guided by his Palmer, was safely

¹ Distress ² Prepare ³ Wilful ⁴ Which, when gained, proved
to be hatred

rowed through the perilous channel between the Gulf of Greediness and the Rock of Vile Reproach, and came upon a new danger —

*So forth they rowed , and that Ferryman
With his stiff oars did brush the sea so strong,
That the hoar¹ waters from his frigot² ran,
And the light bubbles danced all along,
Whiles the salt brine out of the billows sprong
At last far off they many Islands spy
On every side floating the floods among
Then said the knight ‘ Lo ! I the land descry ,
Therefore, old Sire, thy course do thereunto apply ’*

*‘ That may not be,’ said then the Ferryman,
‘ Lest we unweeting hap to be fordone³ ,
For those same Islands, seeming now and then,
Are not firm land, nor any certain wonne,⁴
But straggling plots which to and fro do run
In the wide waters therefore are they hight
The Wandering Islands Therefore do them shun ,
For they have oft drawn many a wandering wight⁵
Into most deadly danger and distressed plight*

*‘ Yet well they seem to him, that far doth view,
Both fair and fruitful, and the ground⁶ disspread⁶
With grassy green of delectable hue ,
And the tall trees with leaves apparelled
- That mote⁷ the passengers thereto allure ,
But whosoever once hath fastened
His foot thereon, may never it recure⁸,
But wandereth evermore uncertain and unsure*

¹ White ² Boat ³ Unknowing chance to be destroyed ⁴ Abode
⁵ Person ⁶ Spread ⁷ May ⁸ Recover

*They to him hearken, as beseemeth meet¹,
And pass on forward so their way does lie,
That one of those same Islands, which do fleet
In the wide sea, they needs must passen by,
Which seemed so sweet and pleasant to the eye,
That it would tempt a man to touchen there
Upon the bank they sitting did espy
A dainty damsel dressing of her harr,
By whom a little skippet² floating did appear*

Spenser was an adept at describing "dainty damsels" and all kinds of delights, from banquets to beautiful gardens. The moralist in him tried to disapprove, but fortunately the poet and lover of beauty had the upper hand. The *Faerie Queene* is read and enjoyed to-day, not as a treatise on virtue, but for those qualities by which, in the words of Sidney, poetry "may make the too-much loved earth more lovely."

¹ As is fit ² Boat

CHAPTER VII

MARLOWE

I

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE was a typical product of the Renaissance. The new learning went to his head, and he had an excellent head for it to go to

*Nature that framed us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,¹
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds*

he makes Tamburlaine say, and it was certainly true of himself. The elements warred within his breast, till they destroyed him. His mind aspired proudly, acknowledging no limit to its range, and in his short life he achieved enough to make it the most promising, in the history of our literature, that was ever cut short untimely.

The son of a shoemaker, Marlowe was born in Canterbury in 1564, the same year, as Shakespeare. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury, and went from there to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, taking his degree in 1583. Next to nothing is known about his life there, though he was soon to become famous as the greatest of a set of writers known as "the University Wits," who descended in a body upon the theatre of the time, carrying all before them. Their success aroused resentment, as might be

¹ Mastery

expected, and when, in 1587, Marlowe's first play, *Tamburlaine*, was performed, it came under a general condemnation of those "idiot art masters¹ who intrude themselves to our ears as the alchymists of eloquence, who (mounted on the stage of arrogance) think to outbrave better pens by the swelling bombast of braggart blank verse." The University Wits made blank verse the language of the theatre for several generations, but it was Marlowe who first indicated its possibilities, expanding it from a mechanical jog-trot to be the vehicle for a noble and vigorous poetry. To realise the greatness and the sheer originality of his achievement, we have only to turn back to the earliest plays in blank verse, to compare any dozen lines of Marlowe with any dozen, for instance, from Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*. It may well have been Marlowe's development of the blank verse line which decided Shakespeare to use it for his plays. The two were friends, and collaborated in *Henry the Sixth*. Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* shows the influence of Marlowe, and he must have had his friend's *Edward the Second* in mind several times in writing *Richard the Second*. We can see that Marlowe, even if he had lived, would not have been another Shakespeare; but if both had died in the same year, there is no doubt who would appear the greater man. Moreover, Marlowe paved the way for Shakespeare's work in the theatre.

We do not know much about his life. The temptation of the time, for men of intellect, was to become intoxicated with the power of intellect; and with Marlowe this pride ran high. He was a freethinker, and expressed himself with a vigour which shocked his

¹ Masters of Arts, i.e. university men

contemporaries In 1593, he was summoned to appear before the Privy Council on a charge of blasphemy, but did not live to stand his trial When he died, stabbed during some quarrel in a public house, there were many who pointed the moral, and regarded his death as a judgment upon him for his blasphemies What has been apparent ever since was that a drunken serving-man's dagger cut short the career of one of the finest of English poets, whose bare ten years of work have enabled him to take his place without any handicap for his youth, or any extra allowance for his promise, but on the sheer merit of what he actually accomplished

His first play, *Tamburlaine the Great*, showed at once the bent of his "aspiring mind" Marlowe was fascinated by the idea of power In *Tamburlaine* it is temporal power, the power of a conqueror In *The Jew of Malta*, it is the power of riches In *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*, his greatest play, it is occult power the power which Satan offered Our Lord upon the mountain top Faustus sells his soul to the powers of evil in return for a period of absolute power on Earth It is significant that the first thing he does is to question Mephistophelis about the secrets of the universe Intellectual curiosity came first pleasures afterwards

Tamburlaine expresses the desire for power in its crudest form

TAMBURLAINE Is it not passing brave to be a king,
And ride in triumph through Persepolis?

A god is not so glorious as a king
 I think the pleasure they enjoy in heaven,
 Cannot compare with kingly joys on earth,
 To wear a crown enchas'd with pearl and gold,
 Whose virtues carry with it life and death,
 To ask and have, command and be obey'd

The conquering hero soon reaches the summit of his power, in one scene appearing in a car to which two kings are harnessed as horses

Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia!
 What, can ye draw but twenty miles a day,
 And have so proud a chariot at your heels,
 And such a coachman as great Tamburlaine?

The play is a riot of exaggeration and magnificent language. All that happens during the course of it is merely a series of pegs on which to hang fine sounding speeches, thunderous boasts, loud lamentations, and full-blooded curses. Two of Tamburlaine's captives, Bajazeth and Zabina, before braining themselves, against the cage in which the proud Bajazeth is dragged about, curse him in the most thorough-going manner. It can be imagined how popular such a play of conquest was in the age of Hawkins, Grenville, Frobisher, and Drake, and with what delight the audience must have heard its splendid language. Tamburlaine's pride, as was prophesied by one of his earliest victims, brings about his overthrow - but he has already felt, in the loss of his favourite wife Zenocrate, the one power before which his own is nothing, the power of death. It is in vain for him to claim a mastery

See, where my slave, the ugly monster Death,
Shaking and quivering, pale and wan for fear,
Stands aiming at me with his murdering dart,
Who flies away at every glance I give,
And, when I look away, comes stealing on.

and he at last admits that "Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die "

2

From *Tamburlaine*, which so clearly expresses the youthful Marlowe, we pass naturally to *Dr Faustus*, his masterpiece, in which are revealed the full powers of his mind. Tragedy is the struggle of the soul with an object that cannot be removed and Marlowe, whose mind struggled fearlessly with the greatest obstacles a man can propose to himself, was possessed by a real tragic genius. The real point about *Dr Faustus* is that its hero, though he buys power from the devil, does not buy it for devilish ends or for mere self-indulgence. He buys it to bring within the reach of man knowledge which is otherwise unattainable. The Faust of Gounod's opera is by comparison a mere vulgarian, using magic powers to secure hobbledehoy ambitions. It is not too much to say that Marlowe's masterpiece sums up, not only himself, but the entire spirit of the Renaissance.

Dr. Faustus, a famous scholar, is dissatisfied with the fruits of learning, and turns to magic. He is pondering a book of necromancy, in his study, when a Good Angel and an Evil Angel enter to him.

GOOD ANGEL . O, Faustus, lay thy damned book aside,
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head !
Read, read the Scriptures —that is blasphemy.

EVIL ANGEL Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all Nature's treasure is contain'd
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and commander of these elements

Thus, at the outset, the problem of the play is stated
Faustus listens to the Evil Angel, and by the performance of a magic rite calls up Mephistophels Mephistophels explains that he cannot serve Faustus without leave from Lucifer

FAUSTUS Tell me what is that Lucifer thy lord ?

MEPHISTOPHELIUS · Arch-regent and commander of all
spirits

FAUST Was not that Lucifer an angel once

MEPH. Yes, Faustus, and most dearly lov'd of God.

FAUST · How comes it, then, that he is prince of
devils

MEPH O, by aspiring pride and insolence ,

For which God threw him from the face of heaven

FAUST And what are you that live with Lucifer ?

MEPH Unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer,

Conspir'd against our God with Lucifer,

And are for ever damn'd with Lucifer

FAUST Where are you damn'd ?

MEPH In hell

FAUST How comes it, then, that you are out of hell ?

MEPH Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it

Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,

And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,

Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss ?

Soon, despite the renewed counsels of the Good Angel, Faustus has sold his soul to Lucifer, signing the deed with his blood,

On these conditions following First that Faustus may be a spirit in form and substance Secondly, that Mephistophelis shall be his servant, and at his command Thrdly, that Mephistophelis shall do for him, and bring him whatsoever he desires Fourthly, that he shall be in his chamber or house invisible Lastly, that he shall appear to the said John Faustus, at all times, in what form or shape soever he please I, John Faustus, of Wertenberg, Doctor, by these presents, do give both body and soul to Lucifer prince of the east, and his minister Mephistophelis, and furthermore grant unto them, that, twenty-four years being expired, the articles above-written inviolate, full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods, unto their habitation wheresoever By me, John Faustus

Is it perhaps a sign of uneasiness, despite his apparent confidence, that his first question is about hell? And that he presently says "Come, I think hell's a fable" "Ay, think so still," drily replies Mephistophelis "till experience change thy mind"

From then onwards, throughout the course of the play, Faustus has his will. All knowledge is his. he has Helen of Troy for his lady love. he assumes the form of a spirit, he plays practical jokes upon the

Pope Periodically he suffers from fits of remorse, and is at once encouraged by the Good Angel, but Lucifer and Beelzebub come to reinforce Mephistophilis, and bid him think only upon this world and the hell that shall follow. At last the twenty-four years are over, and Faust, on his last evening, waits in terror for Lucifer to claim his bargain. The scholars who are his friends try to comfort him. It is no use, he tells them

FAUSTUS But Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned the serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus. Ah, gentlemen, hear me with patience, and tremble not at my speeches! Though my heart pants and quivers to remember that I have been a student here these thirty years, O, would I had never seen Wertenberg, never read book! and what wonders I have done, all Germany can witness, yea, all the world, for which Faustus hath lost both Germany and the world, yea, heaven itself, heaven, the seat of God, the throne of the blessed, the kingdom of joy, and must remain in hell for ever, hell, ah, hell, for ever! Sweet friends, what shall become of Faustus, being in hell for ever?

The scholars leave him, shaking their heads. He is all alone

FAUSTUS Ah, Faustus
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually!
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come,

Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
 Perpetual day, or let this hour be but
 A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
 That Faustus may repent and save his soul !

*O lente, lente currite, noctis equi*¹ !

The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
 The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd
 O, I'll leap up to my God !—Who pulls me down ?—
 See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the
 firmament² !

One drop would save my soul, half a drop ah, my
 Christ !—

Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ !
 Yet will I call on him O, spare me, Lucifer !—
 Where is it now ? 'tis gone and see, where God
 Stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows !
 Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,
 And hide me from the heavy wrath of God !
 No, no !

Then will I headlong run into the earth .
 Earth, gape ! O, no, it will not harbour me !
 You stars that reign'd at my nativity,³
 Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
 Now draw up Faustus, like a foggy mist,
 Into the entrails of yon labouring clouds,
 That, when you vomit forth into the air,
 My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,
 So that my soul may but ascend to heaven !

(The clock strikes the half-hour.)

Ah, half the hour is past ! 'twill all be past anon

¹ O run slowly, slowly, horses of the night ! ² Heavens ³ A reference to the belief of the astrologers that our lives are determined by the position of the stars in the heavens at the hour of our birth.

O God,
 If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
 Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransom'd
 me,

Impose some end to my incessant pain,
 Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
 A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd !

O, no end is limited to damned souls !

Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul ?

Or why is this immortal that thou hast ?

Ah, Pythagoras¹ metempsychosis, were that true,

This soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd

Unto some brutish beast ! all beasts are happy,

For, when they die,

Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements,

But mine must live still to be plagu'd in hell

Curs'd be the parents that engender'd me !

No, Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer

That hath depriv'd thee of the joys of heaven.

(The clock strikes twelve)

O, it strikes, it strikes ! Now, body, turn to air,

Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell !

(Thunder and lightning)

O soul, be chang'd into little water-drops,

And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found !

Enter DEVILS

My God, my God, look not so fierce on me !

Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while !

Ugly hell, gape not ! come not, Lucifer !

I'll burn my books !—Ah, Mephistophelis !

Exeunt DEVILS with FAUSTUS

¹ Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher, taught the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. The human soul, he believed, passed through many lives, including those of animals.

The striking of the clock, which compresses an hour into about five minutes, is the only thing that lessens the effect of this scene for a modern audience, accustomed to the realistic production of plays but we realise at once that Marlowe does not mean it to be taken literally. He is concerned only to show that the last hour of life passes too terribly fast. The story of Faustus has fascinated the world and Goethe, the great German poet, whose Faust was likewise his masterpiece, paid a fine tribute to the play upon which it was based.

3

Of Marlowe's other plays we need consider only one *The Jew of Malta* he finished in a hurry. *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, based on the early books of Virgil's *Æneid*, was a difficult subject for the stage and *The Massacre at Paris*, a chronicle play describing the massacre of St. Bartholomew, did not give him scope for his characteristic powers. *Edward the Second*, however, is an exceedingly fine play upon a subject close to Marlowe's heart. The problem of kingship was seldom far from his thoughts, and the story of a king who fell and was foully murdered, with his wife's full approval, was one from which he could extract the last ounce of power and pathos. The play opens at once with the theme which brought about Edward's ruin. Gaveston, the banished favourite, against whom Edward I had so fiercely warned his son, comes in reading a letter

My father is deceas'd. Come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.

Edward's devotion to his favourites, whom he frankly preferred to his queen, was the cause of his fall. The favourites gave him bad advice, leading him to offend the powerful nobles. Isabella, jealous, found favourites of her own, and plotted against her husband. It is in vain for the Earl of Lancaster to plead :

My lord, why do you thus incense your peers,
That naturally would love and honour you,
But for that base and obscure Gaveston ?

Edward, deep in folly, sends his favourite's enemy, the Bishop of Coventry, to the Tower, and allows Gaveston to seize his goods. Thus, in a couple of swift scenes, we see him estrange both the nobles and the Church. A few minutes later, Isabella comes in

YOUNG MORTIMER. Madam, whither walks your majesty
so fast ?

QUEEN ISABELLA : Unto the forest, gentle Mortimer,
To live in grief and baleful discontent ,
For now my lord the king regards me not,
And, when I come, he frowns, as who should say
" Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston "

The nobles combine, and force Edward to banish Gaveston. He is heartbroken. Isabella, hoping to regain his love, brings him the news that Gaveston is recalled. Gaveston returns, but makes more mischief, and finally the nobles put him to death. Edward swears to be revenged, but the power is quickly taken from his hands. He is deposed, imprisoned, and subjected to every sort of indignity. Yet his spirit remains firm, amazing his gaolers.

Enter MATREVIS and GURNEY

MATREVIS Gurney, I wonder the king dies not,

Being in a vault up to the knees in water,

To which the channels of the castle run,

From whence a damp continually ariseth,

That were enough to poison any man,

Much more a king, brought up so tenderly

GURNEY And so do I, Matrevis, yesternight

I open'd but the door to throw him meat,

And I was almost stifled with the savour

MATREVIS He hath a body able to endure

More than we can inflict and therefore now

Let us assail his mind another while

GURNEY Send for him out thence, and I will anger
him

Then Mortimer, the Queen's favourite, sends a murderer with a message in Latin, carefully phrased so that it may be read in two ways. The gaolers have little difficulty in deciding what to do, more particularly as a postscript clearly enjoins that the messenger (Lightborn) shall himself be put to death afterwards.

KING EDWARD Who's there? what light is that?
wherefore com'st thou?

LIGHTBORN To comfort you, and bring you joyful
news

K EDW. Small comfort finds poor Edward in thy
looks

Villan, I know thou com'st to murder me.

LIGHT To murder you, my most gracious lord?

Far is it from my heart to do you harm

The queen sent me to see how you were us'd,
For she relents at this your misery
And what eye can refrain from shedding tears,
To see a king in this most piteous state ?

K EDW Weep'st thou already ? list a while to me,
And then thy heart, were it as Gurney's is,
Or as Matrevis', hewn from the Caucasus,
Yet will it melt ere I have done my tale
This dungeon where they keep me is the sink
Wherein the filth of all the castle falls.

LIGHT O villains !

K EDW And there, in mire and puddle, have I stood
This ten days' space , and, lest that I should sleep,
One plays continually upon a drum ,
They give me bread and water, being a king ;
So that, for want of sleep and sustenance,
My mind's distemper'd, and my body's numb'd,
And whether I have limbs or no I know not
O, would my blood dropp'd out from every vein,
As doth this water from my tatter'd robes !
Tell Isabel the queen, I look'd not thus,
When for her sake I ran at tilt in France,
And there unhors'd the Duke of Cleremont

LIGHT. O, speak no more, my lord ! this breaks my
heart

Lie on this bed, and rest yourself a while

K EDW These looks of thine can harbour naught but ,
death ,

I see my tragedy written in thy brows.
Yet stay a while , forbear thy bloody hand,
And let me see the stroke before it comes,
That even then when I shall lose my life,
My mind may be more steadfast on my God

LIGHT. : What means your highness to mistrust me thus ?

K. EDW . What mean'st thou to dissemble with me thus ?

LIGHT : These hands were never stain'd with innocent blood,

Nor shall they now be tainted with a king's.

K. EDW Forgive my thought for having such a thought.

One jewel have I left ; receive thou this ·

(*giving jewel*)

Still fear I, and I know not what's the cause,

But every joint shakes as I give it thee,

O, if thou harbour'st murder in thy heart,

Let this gift change thy mind, and save thy soul !

Know that I am a king. Oh, at that name,

I feel a hell of grief ! where is my crown ?

Gone, gone ! and do I (still) remain alive ?

LIGHT. You're overwatch'd, my lord : lie down and rest.

K EDW But that grief keeps me waking, I should sleep ;

For not these ten days have these eye-lids clos'd

Now, as I speak, they fall , and yet with fear

Open again O, wherefore sitt'st thou here ?

LIGHT. . If you mistrust me, I'll be gone, my lord.

K EDW No, no , for, if thou mean'st to murder me,

Thou wilt return again , and therefore stay (*Sleeps*)

LIGHT. He sleeps.

K EDW. (*waking*) · O, let me not die yet ! O, stay a while !

LIGHT. : How now, my lord !

K EDW Something still buzzeth in mine ears,
 And tells me, if I sleep, I never wake :
 This fear is that which makes me tremble thus ,
 And therefore tell me, wherefore art thou come ?
 LIGHT · To rid thee of thy life —Matrevis, come !

Enter MATREVIS and GURNEY

K EDW I am too weak and feeble to resist —
 · Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul !

LIGHT · Run for the table

K EDW O, spare me, or despatch me in a trice !
(MATREVIS brings in a table. KING EDWARD is murdered by holding him down on the bed with the table, and stamping on it)

LIGHT So, lay the table down, and stamp on it,
 But not too hard, lest that you bruise his body

MAT I fear me that this cry will raise the town,
 And therefore let us take horse and away

LIGHT Tell me, sirs, was it not bravely done ?

GUR Excellent well · take this for thy reward
(Stabs LIGHTBORN, who dies)
 Come, let us cast the body in the moat,
 And bear the king's to Mortimer our lord
 Away ! *(Exeunt with the bodies)*

The new king, Edward the Third, avenges his father instantly.

FIRST LORD Fear not, my lord , know that you are
 a king.

K. EDW THIRD . Villain !—

Y. MORTIMER : Ho, now, my lord !

K. EDW. THIRD Think not that I am frightened with
 thy words

My father's murder'd through thy treachery ;
 And thou shalt die, and on his mournful hearse
 Thy hateful and accursed head shall lie,
 To witness to the world that by thy means
 His kingly body was too soon interr'd

Q ISAB Weep not, sweet son

K EDW THIRD · Forbid me not to weep , he was my
 father ,

And had you lov'd him half so well as I,
 You could not bear his death thus patiently
 But you, I fear, conspir'd with Mortimer

FIRST LORD · Why speak you not unto my lord the
 king ?

Y MORTIMER Because I think scorn to be accus'd
 Who is the man dares say I murder'd him ?

K EDW THIRD Traitor, in me my loving father
 speaks,

And plainly saith, 'twas thou that murder'dst him

Y. MORTIMER But hath your grace no other proof
 than this ?

K EDW THIRD Yes, if this be the hand of Mortimer
(Showing letter)

Y MORTIMER False Gurney hath betray'd me and
 himself *(Aside to QUEEN ISAB.)*

Q ISAB. · I fear'd as much · murder can not be hid.

Y MORTIMER It is my hand , what gather you by
 this ?

K EDW THIRD That thither thou didst send a mur-
 derer.

Y MORTIMER What murderer ? bring forth the man
 I sent.

K EDW. THIRD · Ah, Mortimer, thou know'st that he is
 slain !

- And so shalt thou be too —Why stays he here ?
Bring him unto a hurdle, drag him forth ,
Hang him, I say, and set his quarters up
And bring his head back presently to me
- Q ISAB : For my sake, sweet son, pity Mortimer !
- Y MORTIMER Madam, entreat not I will rather die
Than sue for life unto a paltry boy
- K EDW THIRD Hence with the traitor, with the
murderer !
- Y. MORTIMER Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy
wheel
There is a point, to which when men aspire,
They tumble headlong down that point I touch'd,
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
Why should I grieve at my declining fall ?—
Farewell, fair queen : weep not for Mortimer,
That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,
Goes to discover countries yet unknown

There, in Mortimer's last words, speaks Marlowe, and there speaks the very spirit of the Renaissance the pride of intellect that, having enjoyed the world's goods, defies it to do its worst, despising the only enemy that cannot be overcome

Besides his plays, Marlowe began a long poem, *Hero and Leander*, which sounded a new note in English poetry, and remains to tantalise us by its incompleteness and by its hint of all he might have done if he had lived It was completed by another poet and dramatist, George Chapman, but not, alas, as it was begun.

CHAPTER VIII

SHAKESPEARE

1

IT is a pity that it is so seldom possible for us to discover the work of great writers for ourselves. Too often, we are solemnly warned of their greatness, and when the book is put into our hands, we are disappointed. To be told that Shakespeare is the greatest writer who ever lived, and then to start upon a play which perhaps at first conveys nothing to us, is a bewildering (and quite unnecessary) experience. We have been led somehow to expect that every sentence of every play we read will be a sample of the best writing in the world—which is, of course, nonsense. Shakespeare is the greatest writer in virtue of the *whole* of his work, the amazing sum total of it all, not because every line is perfect. Often he reaches heights which are beyond the reach of all others. Often and often he reaches heights which others could touch only now and then. But, when all is said and done, he is the king of writers because no other had so wide a range, or understood so much: and because his work is not a haphazard total of all the things he ever wrote, but a complete thing in itself—a single huge poem, developed, natural, and finished. Shakespeare did not go on writing till the day of his death, though he died in early middle age. He had definitely retired, and ceased to write, because he knew, consciously or instinctively, that his work was finished.

About his life we know very little. He was born at Stratford-on-Avon in 1564, and was possibly educated at the grammar school there. Of his studies we can only conjecture. His friend Ben Jonson said that he had "small Latin, and less Greek." At the age of nineteen, he married Ann Hathaway, who was a few years older than himself. There were children, but the marriage was not happy, and Shakespeare ran away to London. He seems to have made at once for the theatre, but whether he at once became an actor we cannot be sure. What is certain is that by 1592, ten years after his marriage, and eight years after the birth of a twin son and daughter, he was already well known as an actor and as a playwright. We know this from an attack upon him by an older playwright, Robert Greene, who, in his pamphlet *A Groatsworth of Wit*, warned Marlowe and his "fellow Schollers" that it was no use their continuing to write plays, since there was "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide* supposes he is as well able to bumbast out blanke verse as the best of you. and . . . is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrie." In the third part of *Henry VI* occurs the line "O Tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide," which, with the pun "Shake-scene," make it clear at whom Greene was hitting. That Shakespeare was well thought of is proved by the publishers' apology for the attack, which was printed a few months later. In 1594, Shakespeare appeared as an actor before Queen Elizabeth, as a member of a company known as The Chamberlain's Men. His long poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) were dedicated to the Earl

of Southampton By 1597 he had made enough money to buy the biggest house at Stratford, and in the following year he was named by Meres the critic as the best playwright of his time He retired in 1611, and died, tradition says of fever, in 1616

Shakespeare's first work as playwright was almost undoubtedly to touch up old plays for the company to which he belonged In those days a play had a very short run, and there was a continual demand for new plays to keep the actors busy Far more of Shakespeare's work consisted of revising old plays than was at first realised but the revision, from being at first the adding of a scene here and a few lines there, developed into a complete re-writing, and the transformation of an old plot into an original work of art We know, for instance, that there was an earlier version of *Hamlet* but that does not in any way detract from the greatness of Shakespeare's achievement He did not care where he got his plots A plot, for him, was the stimulus that set his mind working He turned the plot over in his mind, altered it, reconsidered it, joined it maybe to another, and produced from the mixture something new and splendid He took a historical subject from North's translation of Plutarch or from Holinshead's chronicles, altering and condensing freely to bring out character, provide dramatic effect, and make a play

The work of Shakespeare groups itself fairly naturally into four periods Before 1594, he was learning his trade, touching up old plays like *Titus Andronicus*, an absurd Chamber-of-Horrors tragedy, and writing his first comedies From 1594 to 1600, with the exception of a single tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, he was busy with

comedies and plays on subjects taken from English history. Then came the eight years that gave us the great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and one or two comedies in which tragedy is not far off. and finally, from 1609 to 1611, a time in which he wrote the reflective comedies, of which the greatest is *The Tempest*. In this, as the magician Prospero, he formally bade farewell to his art, and to Ariel, the "sprite" who had inspired him and whom his mind had kept prisoner.

2

Shakespeare is so great, so rich, and so inexhaustible that it does not much matter how we first approach him. It will perhaps be best, and more in accord with the plan of the book as a whole, if we approach him first as a creator of character, rather than as a poet. The selections that follow, therefore, will almost all be taken from the comedies and histories; but first of all let us run over briefly the story of Shakespeare's first tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*.

Two noble families of Verona, the Montagues and the Capulets, are at feud with one another. Romeo meets Juliet at a ball. He does not know that she is a Capulet, nor does she know who he is. They fall headlong in love, and are not deterred by discovering to what family each belongs. To communicate with one another they make use of Juliet's old Nurse. Here is an extract from a scene in which the Nurse returns from an important errand to Romeo:

Enter NURSE and PETER (a servant)

JULIET .

O honey nurse ! what news ?

Hast thou met with him ? Send thy man away

NURSE Peter, stay at the gate (*Exit PETER*)

JULIET Now, good sweet nurse,—O Lord ! why
look'st thou sad ?

Though news be sad, yet tell them merrily,
If good, thou sham'st the music of sweet news
By playing it to me with so sour a face

NURSE I am aweary, give me leave awhile —

Fie, how my bones ache ! What a jaunt have I had !

JULIET . I would thou hadst my bones, and I thy news
Nay, come, I pray thee, speak,—good, good nurse,
speak

NURSE Jesu, what haste ? Can you not stay awhile ?
Do you not see that I am out of breath ?

JULIET How art thou out of breath, when thou hast
breath

To say to me—that thou art out of breath ?
The excuse that thou dost make in this delay
Is longer than the tale thou dost excuse
Is thy news good, or bad ? answer to that,
Say either, and I'll stay the circumstance
Let me be satisfied, is't good or bad ?

NURSE Well, you have made a simple choice ; you
know not how to choose a man Romeo ! no, not
he, though his face be better than any man's, yet
his leg excels all men's ; and for a hand, and a foot,
and a body,—though they be not to be talked on,
yet they are past compare ; he is not the flower of
courtesy,—but, I'll warrant him, as gentle as a
lamb Go thy ways, wench ; serve God—What, have
you dined at home ?

JULIET No, no—but all this did I know before
What says he of our marriage ? what of that ?

NURSE Lord, how my head aches ! what a head have I !

It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces
My back ! o' t'other side .—O, my back, my back !—
Beshrew your heart for sending me about,
To catch my death with jaunting up and down

JULIET I' faith, I am sorry that thou art not well.

• Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me, what says my love ?

NURSE Your love says, like an honest gentleman,
And a courteous, and a kind, and a handsome,
And, I warrant, a virtuous —Where is your mother ?

JULIET Where is my mother ?—why, she is within,
Where should she be ? How oddly thou reply'st !
“ Your love says, like an honest gentleman —
Where is your mother ? ”

NURSE . O, God's lady dear !
Are you so hot ? Marry, come up, I trow ,
Is this the poultice for my aching bones ?
Henceforward do your messages yourself.

JULIET .

Here's such a coil¹ !—Come, what says Romeo ?

NURSE Have you got leave to go to shrift² to-day ?

JULIET : I have

NURSE Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence' cell
There stays a husband to make you a wife

With the connivance of Friar Laurence, a friend of Romeo's, the lovers have arranged to get married secretly, since open marriage is impossible. Friar Laurence marries them. Soon afterwards, Romeo has

¹ Fuss ² Confession

the misfortune to meet Tybalt, a quarrelsome Capulet, in the streets Tybalt insults him. The Prince has expressly forbidden fighting, under severe penalties, but this is not why Romeo returns a gentle answer. It is because Tybalt is now his kinsman. Mercutio, one of Romeo's friends, knowing nothing of the marriage, is horrified at what he considers rank cowardice, and challenges Tybalt. Tybalt kills him: and Romeo, forgetting everything, in revenge kills Tybalt.

Here is a terrible situation for the lovers. Romeo has to fly for his life, and a sentence of banishment is pronounced upon him. But worse is to come. Juliet's parents arrange for her to be married! She turns for help to the Nurse, but, alas, her old comforter fails her. Overawed by her employers, and doubtless afraid that, if the marriage to Romeo comes out, her own part in it will come out also, the Nurse placidly advises her to make the best of the position and to forget Romeo. To Juliet's agonised question, "O God! O Nurse, how shall this be prevented? What say'st thou? hast thou not a word of joy?" she replies—

Faith, here it is Romeo
Is banish'd, and all the world to nothing,
That he dares ne'er come back to challenge you,
Or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the county¹
O, he's a lovely gentleman!
Romeo's a dishclout to him: an eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye,

¹ Count

As Paris hath Beshrew my very heart,
 I think you are happy in this second match,
 For it excels your first or if it did not,
 Your first is dead, or 'twere as good he were.
 As living here and you no use of him.

JULIET Speakest thou from thy heart?

NURSE . And from my soul too
 • Or else beshrew¹ them both.

JULIET Amen!

NURSE What?

JULIET: Well, thou hast comforted me marvellous
 much

Go in, and tell my lady I am gone,
 Having displeas'd my father, to Laurence' cell,
 To make confession, and to be absolv'd

NURSE Marry, I will, and this is wisely done (*Exit*)

JULIET Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!

Is it more sin to wish me thus forsworn,²
 Or to dispraise my lord with that same tongue
 Which she hath prais'd him with above compare
 So many thousand times?—Go, counsellor,
 Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain.
 I'll to the friar, to know his remedy:
 If all else fail, myself have power to die. (*Exit*)

In her despair, Juliet consults Friar Laurence. He cannot acknowledge what has happened, any more than she can. but he hits upon a desperate solution. He gives Juliet a drug, which will make her unconscious, and produce all the apparent signs of death. At the same time he sends a letter to Romeo, who is in Mantua, explaining what has happened, and telling

¹ Curse ² Perjured, treacherous

him to come and rescue Juliet from the vault where she will be laid

It is a daring plan, calling for great courage on the part of Juliet. Her mother and the Nurse leave her for the night. She is to be married to-morrow.

JULIET Farewell!—God knows when we shall meet again

I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life
I'll call them back again to comfort me,—
Nurse!—What should she do here?
My dismal scene I needs must act alone—
Come, phial!¹

What if this mixture do not work at all?
Shall I be married, then, to-morrow morning?
No, no,—this shall forbid it—he thou there
(*Laying down a dagger*)

What if it be a poison, which the friar
Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead,
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd,
Because he married me before to Romeo?
I fear it is, and yet, methinks, it should not,
For he hath still been tried² a holy man
I will not entertain so bad a thought
How if, when I am laid into the tomb,
I wake before the time that Romeo
Come to redeem me? there's a fearful point!
Shall I not, then, be stifled in the vault,
To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,
And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?
Or, if I live, is it not very like,

¹ The bottle containing the drug ² Proved

The horrible conceit of death and night,
Together with the terror of the place,—
As in a vault, an ancient receptacle,
Where, for these many hundred years, the bones
Of all my buried ancestors are pack'd,
Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
Lies fester¹ing in his shroud, where, as they say,
At some hours in the night spirits resort,—
Alack, alack, is it not like, that I,
So early waking,—what with loathsome smells,
And shrieks like mandrakes¹ torn out of the earth.
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad,—
O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
Environèd with all these hideous fears?
And madly² play with my forefathers' joints?
And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?
And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,
As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?
O, look! methinks I see my cousin's ghost
Seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body
Upon a rapier's point,—stay, Tybalt, stay!—
Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee
(Throws herself on the bed).

Now comes tragedy. Friar Laurence's letter fails to reach Romeo, and he hears the news of Juliet's death from a servant. By a cruel irony, the message reaches him when he is feeling happy for the first time

ROMEO If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand.

¹ Roots shaped something like men, and believed to be alive

My bosom's lord¹ sits lightly in his throne,
 And all this day an unaccustom'd spirit
 Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts
 I dreamt, my lady came and found me dead,
 (Strange dream ! that gives a dead man leave to
 think,)

And breath'd such life with kisses in my lips,
 That I reviv'd, and was an emperor.
 Ah me ! how sweet is love itself possess'd,
 When but love's shadows are so rich in joy !

Enter BALTHAZAR (servant to ROMEO)

News from Verona !—How now, Balthazar !
 Dost thou not bring me letters from the friar ?
 How doth my lady ? Is my father well ?
 How fares my Juliet ? That I ask again,
 For nothing can be ill, if she be well

BALTHAZAR Then she is well, and nothing can be ill
 Her body sleeps in Capels' monument,
 And her immortal part with angels lives
 I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault,
 And presently took post to tell it you
 O, pardon me for bringing these ill news,
 Since you did leave it for my office, sir

ROMEO Is it even so ? then I defy you, stars !—
 Thou know'st my lodging : get me ink and paper,
 And hire post-horses ; I will hence tonight.

BALTHAZAR I do beseech you, sir, have patience
 Your looks are pale and wild, and do import
 Some misadventure

ROMEO Tush, thou art deceiv'd .
 Leave me, and do the thing I bid thee do
 Hast thou no letters to me from the friar ?

¹ Heart

BALTHAZAR No, my good lord

ROMEO No matter get thee gone,

And hire those horses I'll be with thee straight.

(*Exit* BALTHAZAR.)

Before leaving Mantua, he buys poison from a chemist. The chemist is loth to sell it, for the law of Mantua punishes the sale of such poisons by death. Romeo, resolved upon death, laughs that a man so poor and old should fear to die

ROMEO : Art thou so bare and full of wretchedness,

And fear'st to die ? famine is in thy cheeks,

Need and oppression starveth in thine eyes,

Contempt and beggary hang upon thy back,

The world is not thy friend, nor the world's law

The world affords no law to make thee rich ;

Then be not poor, but break it, and take this.

APOTHECARY My poverty, but not my will, consents

ROMEO . I pay thy poverty, but not thy will.

APOTHECARY . Put this in any liquid thing you will,

And drink it off , and, if you had the strength

Of twenty men, it would despatch you straight

ROMEO : There is thy gold , worse poison to men's
souls,

Doing more murders in this loathsome world,

Than these poor compounds that, thou may'st not
sell .

I sell thee poison, thou hast sold me none

Farewell : buy food, and get thyself in flesh.

Come, cordial, and not poison, go with me

To Juliet's grave , for there I must use thee

(*Exeunt*)

Still upheld by his mood, Romeo comes to the vault where Juliet is laid, breaks it open, and finds her. The signs of returning life are in her face, but her lover does not know it

ROMEO

O my love ! my wife !

Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
 Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty
 Thou art not conquer'd, beauty's ensign yet
 Is crimson in thy lips, and in thy cheeks,
 And death's pale flag is not advanced there
 Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet ?
 O, what more favour can I do to thee,
 Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain,
 To sunder his that was thine enemy ?
 Forgive me, cousin !—Ah, dear Juliet,
 Why art thou yet so fair ? Shall I believe
 That unsubstantial death is amorous,
 And that the lean, abhorred monster keeps
 Thee here in dark to be his paramour ?
 For fear of that, I still will stay with thee,
 And never from this palace of dim night
 Depart again. here, here will I remain
 With worms that are thy chamber-maids, O, here
 Will I set up my everlasting rest,
 And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars¹
 From this world-wearied flesh—Eyes, look your
 last !
 Arms, take your last embrace ! and, lips, O you
 The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
 A dateless bargain to engrossing death !

He takes the phial of poison from his pocket

¹ See p 96, n 3

Come, bitter conduct,¹ come, unsavoury guide !
 Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
 The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark !
 Here's to my love ! (*Drinks*) O true apothecary !
 Thy drugs are quick —Thus with a kiss I die (*Dies*)

Barely has he died when Friar Laurence, hearing that his letter has gone astray, comes hurrying to the vault to rescue Juliet. She wakes at his entrance. Seeing what has happened, she sends the Friar away.

JULIET Go, get thee hence, for I will not away
(*Exit* FRIAR.)

What's here ? A cup, clos'd in my true love's hand ?
 Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end
 O churl ! drink all, and leave no friendly drop
 To help me after ?—I will kiss thy lips ,
 Haply, some poison yet doth hang on them,
 To make me die with a restorative (*Kisses him*)
 Thy lips are warm !

WATCHMAN (*within*) Lead, boy, which way ?

JULIET Yea, noise ?—then I'll be brief —O happy
 dagger ! (*Snatching* ROMEO's dagger)

This is thy sheath , (*Stabs herself*) there rest, and let
 me die (*Dies*)

¹ Leader

CHAPTER IX
SHAKESPEARE (*continued*)

1

NOW FOR the studies of simple life and character which Shakespeare so loved, and in which he excelled. First of all, we will take a look at Dogberry, the pompous village watchman, with his friend and toady Verges, from *Much Ado About Nothing*. Dogberry is the ancestor of the bumptious, self-important type of village policeman. In the scene that follows, he assembles his men, and gives them instructions.

DOGBERRY This is your charge —you shall comprehend¹ all vagrom² men, you are to bid any man stand, in the prince's name.

WATCHMAN How, if a' will not stand?

DOGBERRY Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go, and presently call the rest of the watch together, and thank God you are rid of a knave.

VERGES If he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the prince's subjects.

DOGBERRY True, and they are to meddle with none but the prince's subjects —You shall also make no noise in the streets, for, for the watch to babble and talk, is most tolerable³ and not to be endured.

WATCHMAN We will rather sleep than talk, we know what belongs to a watch.

DOGBERRY Why, you speak like an ancient and most

¹ Dogberry is always using the wrong word, here he means apprehend, i.e. arrest. ² Vagrant. ³ Intolerable.

quiet watchman ; for I cannot see how sleeping should offend only have a care that your bills¹ be not stolen — Well, you are to call at all the ale-houses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed

WATCHMAN How if they will not ?

DOGBERRY Why, then, let them alone till they are sober if they make you not then the better answer, you may say they are not the men you took them for.

WATCHMAN . Well, sir

DOGBERRY If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man , and, for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them, why, the more is for your honesty.

WATCHMAN . If we know him to be a thief, shall we not lay hands on him ?

DOGBERRY . Truly, by your office, you may , but I think they that touch pitch will be defiled the most peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is, to let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company

VERGES You have always been called a merciful man, partner.

DOGBERRY : Truly, I would not hang a dog by my will , much more a man who hath any honesty in him.

VERGES If you hear a child cry in the night, you must call to the nurse, and bid her still it

WATCHMAN How, if the nurse be asleep and will not hear us ?

DOGBERRY . Why, then, depart in peace, and let the

¹ Watchman's weapon

child wake her with crying , for the ewe that will not
hear her lamb when it baas, will never answer a calf
when he bleats

While they are still talking, the watch overhear a
man giving away details of a plot to a friend They
misunderstand what is said, but understand just
enough to arrest the pair Bursting with importance,
Dogberry and Verges go off to give information of
their discovery

LEONATO (Governor of Messina) What would you
with me, honest neighbour ?

DOGBERRY Marry, sir, I would have some confidence
with you, that decerns you nearly ¹

LEON Brief, I pray you , for you see it is a busy time
with me

DOGBERRY Marry, this it is, sir

VERGES Yes, in truth it is, sir

LEON What is it, my good friends ?

DOGB . Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the
matter an old man, sir, and his wits are not so
blunt, as, God help, I would desire they were , but,
in faith, honest as the skin between his brows

VERGES Yes, I thank God, I am as honest as any
man living, that is an old man, and no honester
than I

•DOGB Comparisons are odorous² palabras,³ neigh-
bour Verges.

LEON Neighbours, you are tedious

DOGB It pleases your worship to say so, but we are
the poor duke's officers , but truly, for mine own

¹ Concerns you closely ² Odious ³ He means *pocas palabras*,
the Spanish for "few words"—i.e., keep quiet

part, if I were as tedious¹ as a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your worship

LEON All thy tediousness on me, ha ?

DOGB Yea, an't² were an thousand pound more than 'tis , for I hear as good exclamation on your worship, as of any man in the city , and though I be but a poor man, I am glad to hear it

VERGES · And so am I

LEON I would fain know what you have to say

VERGES · Marry, sir, our watch to-night, excepting your worship's presence, have ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina

DOGB A good old man, sir, he will be talking , as they say, when the age is in, the wit is out God help us ! it is a world to see ! Well said, i' faith, neighbour Verges !—well, God's a good man an two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind.—An honest soul, i' faith, sir , by my troth he is, as ever broke bread but God is to be worshipped all men are not alike ,—alas, good neighbour !

LEON Indeed, neighbour, he comes too short of you.

DOGB Gifts that God gives

LEON I must leave you

DOGB One word, sir our watch, sir, hath indeed comprehended two auspicious² persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship

LEON Take their examination yourself, and bring it me I am now in great haste, as may appear unto you

¹ Dogberry, misunderstanding, takes the word as a compliment
² If it ³ Suspicious

More important than ever, the pair proceed to carry out the examination. They are resolved to do it in style

Scene—a Prison

Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES, and SEXTON, in gowns, and the Watch, with CONRADE and BORACHIO

DOGB. Is our whole dissembly¹ appeared?

VERGES O, a stool and a cushion for the sexton

SEXTON Which be the malefactors?

DOGB. Marry, that am I and my partner²

VERGES Nay, that's certain we have the exhibition to examine

SEXTON But which are the offenders that are to be examined? Let them come before master constable

DOGB. Yea, marry, let them come before me—

What is your name, friend?

BORACHIO Borachio

DOGB. Pray write down—Borachio—Yours, sirrah?

CONRADE. I am a gentleman, sir, and my name is Conrade

DOGB. Write down—master gentleman Conrade.—Masters, do you serve God?

CON, BORA. Yea, sir, we hope

DOGB. Write down—that they hope they serve God—and write God first, for God defend but God should go before such villains!—Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than false knaves; and it will go near to be thought so shortly. How answer you for yourselves?

CON: Marry, sir, we say we are none

DOGB: A marvellous witty fellow, I assure you; but I will go about with him.—Come you hither, sirrah,

¹ Assembly ² Another misunderstanding

a word in your ear, sir I say to you, it is thought you are false knaves.

BORA. Sir, I say to you, we are none

DOGB Well, stand aside—'Fore God, they are both in a tale ¹ Have you writ down—that they are none?

SEXTON : Master constable, you go not the way to examine you must call forth the watch that are their accusers

DOGB Yea, marry, that's the efastest² way—Let the watch come forth—Masters, I charge you, in the prince's name, accuse these men.

1ST WATCH This man said, sir, that Don John, the prince's brother, was a villain

DOGB Write down—Prince John a villain.—Why this is flat perjury, to call a prince's brother villain

BORA Master constable—

DOGB Pray thee, fellow, peace · I do not like thy look, I promise thee

SEXTON What heard you him say else ?

2ND WATCH Marry, that he had received a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the lady Hero, wrongfully.

DOGB. Flat burglary³ as ever was committed.

VERG. Yea, by the mass, that it is

SEXTON What else, fellow ?

1ST WATCH And that count Claudio did mean, upon his words, to disgrace Hero before the whole assembly, and not marry her

DOGB. O villain ! thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption⁴ for this.

SEXTON What else ?

2ND WATCH This is all

¹ They are both agreed ² Best, quickest ³ Perjury ⁴ Perdition

SEXTON And this is more, masters, than you can deny Prince John is this morning secretly stolen away Hero was in this manner accused, in this very manner refused, and, upon the grief of this, suddenly died—Master constable, let these men be bound, and brought to Leonato's, I will go before, and show him their examination (*Exit*)

DOGB Come, let them be opinioned¹

VERG Let them be in the hands—

CON Off, coxcomb!

DOGB God's my life! Where's the sexton? let him write down—the prince's officer, coxcomb—Come, bind them—Thou naughty varlet!

CON Away! you are an ass, you are an ass

DOGB Dost thou not suspect² my place? Dost thou not suspect my years?—O that he were here to write me down an ass!—but, masters, remember that I am an ass, though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass—No, thou villain, thou art full of piety,³ as shall be proved upon thee by good witness I am a wise fellow, and, which is more, an officer, and, which is more, a householder, and, which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any in Messina, and one that knows the law, go to, and a rich fellow enough, go to, and a fellow that hath had losses, and one that hath two gowns, and everything handsome about him—Bring him away—O that I had been writ down an ass!

2

The humour of Dogberry and Co runs on simple lines Any comic actor with a turn for pomposity and

¹ Pinioned, i.e. bound ² Respect. ³ Impiety

an unctuous voice, can make his effect in this part Not so with Falstaff, the next character we shall look at Falstaff, while outwardly he is a fat man with a witty tongue and an abundant taste for drink, has a range and a subtlety which challenge the finest actor The scenes in which he appears are among the greatest in Shakespeare In the space at our command, we can only aim at an introduction to him and his merry company

We meet him first in an inn, the boon companion of young Prince Hal, afterwards Henry V He accuses the Prince of leading him into bad ways —

FALSTAFF Thou hast done much harm, upon me, Hal,—God forgive thee for it ! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing , and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked I must give over this life, and I will give it over , by the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain I'll be damned for ever a king's son in Christendom

P HENRY Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack ?

FALSTAFF Where thou wilt, lad, I'll make one , an I do not, call me villain, and baffle¹ me

P HENRY I see a good amendment of life in thee , from praying to purse-taking

FALSTAFF Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal ! 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation

Poins, another member of the company, comes in, and the party are soon committed to taking a purse in earnest. They will lie in wait at Gadshill.

¹ Insult

POINS . There are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings, and traders riding to London with fat purses I have visors¹ for you all . you have horses for yourselves I have bespoke supper to-morrow night in Eastcheap : we may do it as secure as sleep If you will go, I will stuff your purses full of crowns , if you will not, carry at home and be hanged

As soon as Falstaff has gone out of the room, Poins plots with the Prince to keep out of the way while Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto and Co. take a purse, and then set upon them in the dark and take it from them

P HENRY But I doubt they will be too hard for us

POINS Well, for two of them, I know them to be as true-bred cowards as ever turned back , and for the third, if he fight longer than he sees reason, I'll forswear arms ² The virtue of this jest will be, the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us, when we meet at supper . how thirty, at least, he fought with , what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured , and in the reproof of this lies the jest

P HENRY . Well, I'll go with thee • provide us all things necessary, and meet me to-morrow night in Eastcheap , there I'll sup Farewell.

At the place of meeting, the two conspirators make an excuse to slip away The poor travellers walk unsuspecting into the ambush

Enter TRAVELLERS.

¹ Masks. ² Give up fighting

1ST TRAV Come, neighbour the boy shall lead our horses down the hill, we'll walk afoot awhile, and ease our legs.

FALSTAFF, ETC Stand !

TRAVELLERS Jesu bless us !

FALSTAFF . Strike, down with them, cut the villains' throats.—ah, caterpillars ! bacon-fed knaves ! they hate us youth.—down with them, fleece them

TRAVELLERS O ! we are undone, both we and ours, for ever.

FALSTAFF Hang ye, gorbellied knaves, are ye undone ? No, ye fat chuffs ; I would your store were here ! On, bacons, on ! What, ye knaves ! young men must live You are grand-jurors,¹ are ye ? We'll jure ye, i' faith

Exeunt FALSTAFF, ETC, driving the TRAVELLERS out
Re-enter PRINCE HENRY and POINS, in buckram suits

P HENRY The thieves have bound the true men Now could thou and I rob the thieves, and go merrily to London, it would be argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever

POINS Stand close ; I hear them coming (*They retire*)

Re-enter FALSTAFF, ETC

FALSTAFF Come, my masters, let us share, and then to horse before day An the prince and Poins be not two arrant cowards, there's no equity² stirring there's no more valour in that Poins, than in a wild duck

P HENRY Your money !

POINS Villains !

(*As they are sharing, the PRINCE and POINS rush out*)

¹ Members of a special jury ² Truth.

and set upon them BARDOLPH *and* PETO *run away ,*
and FALSTAFF, *after a blow or two, runs away too,*
leaving the booty behind)

Poins and the Prince then return post-haste to the inn, and await Falstaff's return. He comes in, a picture of righteous indignation and disgust

POINS Welcome, Jack. where hast thou been ?

FALSTAFF A plague of all cowards, I say, and a vengeance, too ! marry, and amen !—Give me a cup of sack,¹ boy A plague of all cowards !—Give me a cup of sack, rogue —Is there no virtue extant ?

(He drinks)

You rogue, there's lime in this sack too there is nothing but roguery to be found in a villainous man yet a coward is worse than a cup of sack with lime in it,—a villainous coward —Go thy ways, old Jack, die when thou wilt, if manhood, good manhood, be not forgot upon the face of the earth, then am I a shotten herring There live not three good men unhanged in England, and one of them is fat, and grows old God help the while ! a bad world, I say

PRINCE HENRY How now, wool-sack ! what mutter you ?

FALSTAFF A king's son ! If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more You Prince of Wales !

PRINCE HENRY Why, you round man, what's the matter ?

FALSTAFF Are you not a coward ? answer me to that .
 and Poins there ?

¹ Wine

POINS 'Zounds! ye fat paunch, an ye call me coward, I'll stab thee

FALSTAFF I call thee coward! I'll see thee damned ere I call thee coward but I would give a thousand pound I could run as fast as thou canst You are straight enough in the shoulders, you care not who sees your back call you that backing¹ of your friends? A plague upon such backing! give me them that will face me Give me a cup of sack —I am a rogue, if I drunk to-day

PRINCE HENRY O villain! thy lips are scarce wiped since thou drunkest last

FALSTAFF All's one for that (*He drinks*) A plague of all cowards, still say I

PRINCE HENRY What's the matter?

FALSTAFF What's the matter! here be four of us have ta'en a thousand pound this day morning.

PRINCE HENRY Where is it, Jack? Where is it?

FALSTAFF Where is it! taken from us it is; a hundred upon poor four of us.

PRINCE HENRY What, a hundred, man?

FALSTAFF I am a rogue, if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together I have 'scap'd by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose, my buckler cut through and through, my sword hacked like hand-saw,—*ecce signum* ¹² I never dealt better since I was a man all would not do A plague of all cowards Let them speak: if they speak more or less than truth, they are villains, and the sons of darkness

PRINCE HENRY: Speak, sirs, how was it?

¹ Backing up ² Behold the evidence (He shows them his sword, which he has hacked about)

GADSHILL We four set upon some dozen——

FALSTAFF Sixteen, at least, my lord

GADSHILL And bound them.

PETO No, no, they were not bound

FALSTAFF You rogue, they were bound, every man
 of them, or I am a Jew else, an Ebrew Jew

GADSHILL As we were sharing, some^e six or seven
 fresh men set upon us,—

FALSTAFF And unbound the rest, and then come in
 the other

PRINCE HENRY What, fought ye with them all ?

FALSTAFF All ! I know not what ye call all, but if I
 fought not with fifty of them, I am a bunch of radish
 if there were not two or three and fifty upon poor
 old Jack, then am I no two-legged creature

PRINCE HENRY Pray God, you have not murdered
 some of them

FALSTAFF Nay, that's past praying for : I have pep-
 pered two of them, two, I am sure, I have paid ;
 two rogues in buckram suits. I tell thee what, Hal, if I
 tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me horse Thou
 knowest my old ward¹ ; here I lay, and thus I bore my
 point. Four rogues in buckram let drive at me,—

PRINCE HENRY What, four ? Thou saidst but two
 even now

FALSTAFF Four, Hal, I told thee four

POINS Ay, ay, he said four

FALSTAFF These four came all a-front, and mainly
 thrust at me I made me no more ado, but took all
 their seven points in my target,² thus.

PRINCE HENRY Seven ? why, there were but four
 even now

¹ Guard, fighting position ² Shield

FALSTAFF In buckram

POINS Ay, four, in buckram suits

FALSTAFF Seven, by these hilts, or I am a villain else

PRINCE HENRY Prythee, let him alone, we shall have
more anon ¹

FALSTAFF . Dost thou hear me, Hal ?

PRINCE HENRY Ay, and mark thee too, Jack

FALSTAFF Do so, for it is worth the listening to
These nine in buckram, that I told thee of,—

PRINCE HENRY So, two more already.

FALSTAFF Their points being broken,—

POINS Down fell their hose ²

FALSTAFF Began to give me ground but I followed
me close, came in, foot and hand, and with a
thought, seven of the eleven I paid

PRINCE HENRY O monstrous ! eleven buckram men
grown out of two

FALSTAFF But, as the devil would have it, three mis-
begotten knaves, in Kendal green, came at my back,
and let drive at me,—for it was so dark, Hal, that
thou couldst not see thy hand

PRINCE HENRY These lies are like the father that
begets them,—gross as a mountain, open, palpable
Why, thou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated
fool, thou obscene, greasy tallow-keech, ³—

FALSTAFF What, art thou mad ? art thou mad ? is not
the truth the truth ?

PRINCE HENRY . Why, how couldst thou know these
men in Kendal green, when it was so dark thou
couldst not see thy hand ? come, tell us your rea-
son what sayest thou to this ?

¹ In a minute ² Poins puns upon the second meaning of points,
1 e braces ³ Lump of fat

POINS Come, your reason, Jack,—your reason.

FALSTAFF What, upon compulsion? No, were I at the strappado,¹ or all the racks in the world, I would not tell you on compulsion. Give you a reason on compulsion! if reasons were as plentiful as blackberries, I would give no man a reason on compulsion, I.

PRINCE HENRY I'll be no longer guilty of this sin; this sanguine² coward, this bed-presser, this horse-back-breaker, this huge hill of flesh,—

FALSTAFF Away, you starveling, you elf-skin, you dried neat's³ tongue, you stock-fish,⁴—O for breath to utter what is like thee!—you tailor's yard, you sheath, you bow-case, you vile standing tuck,⁵—

PRINCE HENRY Well, breathe awhile, and then to it again and when thou hast tired thyself in base comparisons, hear me speak but this.

POINS Mark, Jack

PRINCE HENRY We two saw you four set upon four, you bound them, and were masters of their wealth—Mark now, how a plain tale shall put you down.—Then did we two set upon you four, and, with a word, out-faced you from your prize, and have it, yea, and can show it you here in the house—and, Falstaff, you carried your guts away as nimbly, with as quick dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still ran and roared, as ever I heard bull-calf. What a slave art thou, to hack thy sword as thou hast done, and then say, it was in fight! What trick, what device, what starting-hole, canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

FALSTAFF By the Lord, I knew ye, as well as he that

¹ Torture ² Red-faced ³ Ox-tongue ⁴ Dried cod ⁵ Rapier

made thee Why, hear me, my masters was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules but beware instinct, the lion will not touch the true prince Instinct is a great matter, I was a coward on instinct I shall think the better of myself and thee, during my life, I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince But, by the lord, lads, I am glad you have the money—(*To the hostess within*) Hostess, clap to the doors.—watch to-night, pray to-morrow—Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold, all the titles of good fellowship come to you! What, shall we be merry? shall we have a play extempore?

For their play, they rehearse the sermon the Prince will receive the next day from his father

FALSTAFF · Well, thou wilt be horribly chid to-morrow, when thou comest to thy father if thou love me, practise an answer

PRINCE HENRY : Do thou stand for my father, and examine me upon the particulars of my life.

FALSTAFF Shall I? content—this chair shall be my state,¹ this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown Well, on the fire of grace be not quite out of thee, now shalt thou be moved—Give me cup of sack, to make mine eyes look red, that it may be thought I have wept, for I must speak in passion; and I will do it in King Cambyzes² vein

PRINCE HENRY . Well, here is my leg

FALSTAFF And here is my speech.—Stand aside, nobility.

¹ Throne ² This was the standard phrase for ranting Cambyse was a character in an old play

HOSTESS O Jesu ! This is excellent sport, i' faith !

FALSTAFF Weep not, sweet queen , for trickling tears
are vain ¹

HOSTESS O, the father ! how he holds his countenance !

FALSTAFF For God's sake, lords, convey my tristful²
queen ,

For tears do stop the flood-gates of h^er eyes

HOSTESS O rare ! he doth it as like one of these
players as ever I did see !

FALSTAFF · Peace, good pint-pot ! peace, good tickle-
brain !—Harry, I do not only marvel where you
spendest thy time, but also how thou art accom-
panied for though the camomile, the more it is
trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more
it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my
son . a villainous trick of thine eye, and a foolish
hanging of thy nether lip doth warrant me
If, then, thou be son to me, here lies the point , why,
being son to me, art thou so pointed at ? Shall the
blessed sun of heaven prove a micher,³ and eat
blackberries ? a question not to be asked Shall the
son of England prove a thief, and take purses ? a
question to be asked. There is a thing, Harry, which
thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in
our land by the name of pitch this pitch, as
ancient writers do report, doth defile , so doth the
company thou keepest for, Harry, now I do not
speak to thee in drink, but in tears , not in pleasure,
but in passion , not in words only, but in woes also ·
—and yet there is a virtuous man, whom I have
often noted in thy company, but I know not his
name

¹ Falstaff breaks into pompous blank verse ² Sorrowful ³ Thief

PRINCE HENRY What manner of man, an it like your majesty ?

FALSTAFF A good portly man, i' faith, and a corpulent, of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage, and, as I think, his age some fifty, or by'r lady, inclining to threescore, and now I remember me, his name is Falstaff. if that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me, for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If, then, the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then, peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff. him keep with, the rest banish. And tell me now, thou naughty varlet, tell me, where hast thou been this month ?

PRINCE HENRY. Dost thou speak like a king ? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father

FALSTAFF Depose me ? if thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker, or a poulter's hare ¹

PRINCE HENRY Well, here I am set.

FALSTAFF And here I stand —judge, my masters.

PRINCE HENRY Now, Harry, whence come you ?

FALSTAFF. My noble lord, from Eastcheap

PRINCE HENRY The complaints I hear of thee are grievous

FALSTAFF 'Sblood, my lord, they are false —nay, I'll tickle ye for a young prince, i' faith

PRINCE HENRY Swearest thou, ungracious boy ? henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace. there is a devil haunts thee, in the likeness of a fat old man,—a tun² of

¹ Hare in a poulterer's shop ² Barrel.

man is thy companion Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoln parcel of diopsies, that huge bombard¹ of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox² with the pudding in his belly, that reverend Vice,³ that grey Iniquity, that father Ruffian, that Vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon⁴ and eat it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein crafty, but in villainy? wherein villainous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing?

FALSTAFF. I would your grace would take me with you whom means your grace?

PRINCE HENRY That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan

FALSTAFF. My lord, the man I know.

PRINCE HENRY I know thou dost

FALSTAFF But to say, I know more harm in him than in myself, were to say more than I know. That he is old, (the more the pity,) his white hairs do witness it, if to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know, is damned if to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine⁵ are to be loved. No, my good lord, banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins but, for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company — banish plump Jack, and banish all the world

¹ Leather Vessel ² i.e. Roasted whole ³ Allegorical characters in old plays ⁴ Chicken ⁵ The lean cattle in the dream which Joseph interpreted (Genesis xli 19)

CHAPTER X

SHAKESPEARE (*continued*)

1

FALSTAFF and the Prince are interrupted by the arrival of the Sheriff, hot foot after the robbers. The Prince pacifies him, and he goes away. When he and Poins go to call Falstaff out of hiding, he is found fast asleep behind a curtain. They search his pockets, and find a bill from the hostess.

POINS (reads). Item, A Capon . 2s. 2d
 Item, Sauce 4d.
 Item, Sack, two gallons . 5s 8d
 Item, Anchovies, and sack after supper 2s 6d
 Item, Bread $\frac{1}{2}d$

PRINCE HENRY O monstrous ! but one half-penny-worth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack !—What there is else, keep close, we'll read it at more advantage. There let him sleep till day. I'll to the court in the morning ; we must all to the wars, and thy place shall be honourable. I'll procure this fat rogue a charge of foot¹. The money shall be paid back again with advantage. Be with me betimes in the morning, and so good morrow, Poins.

Soon afterwards, Falstaff is complaining to the Hostess that his pocket has been picked.

¹ A commission in the infantry

FALSTAFF How now, dame Partlet¹ the hen¹ have you enquired yet who picked my pocket ?

HOSTESS Why, sir John, what do you think, sir John ? Do you think I keep thieves in my house ? I have searched, I have enquired, so has my husband, man by man, boy by boy, servant by servant the tithe² of a hair was never lost in my house³ before

FALSTAFF You lie, hostess Bardolph was shaved, and lost many a hair, and I'll be sworn my pocket was picked. Go to, you are a woman, go

HOSTESS Who, I ? No, I defy thee I was never called so in my own house before

FALSTAFF Go to, I know you well enough

HOSTESS No, sir John, you do not know me, sir John I know you, sir John, you owe me money, sir John, and now you pick a quarrel to beguile³ me of it, I bought you a dozen shirts to your back

FALSTAFF Dowlas,⁴ filthy dowlas. I have given them away to bakers' wives, and they have made bolters⁵ of them

HOSTESS Now, as I am a true woman, holland of eight shillings an ell⁶ You owe money here besides, sir John, for your diet, and your by-drinkings, and money lent you, four-and-twenty pound

FALSTAFF He had his part of it, let him pay

HOSTESS He ? alas¹ he is poor, he hath nothing.

FALSTAFF How¹ poor ? look upon his face⁷, what call you rich ? let them coin his nose, let them coin his cheeks I'll not pay a denier⁸ What, will you make a younker⁹ of me ? shall I not take mine ease

¹ Pertelote see p 25 ² The tenth part ³ Cheat ⁴ Coarse material ⁵ Sieves ⁶ Yard ⁷ Bardolph has a very red face
⁸ Tenth of a penny ⁹ Fool

in mine inn, but I shall have my pocket picked ?
I have lost a seal-ring of my grandfather's, worth
forty mark¹ ?

HOSTESS O Jesu ! I have heard the prince tell him,
I know not how oft, that that ring was copper

FALSTAFF How ! the prince is a Jack, a sneak-cup
'Sblood, an he were here I would cudgel him like a
dog, if he would say so

At that moment the Prince and Poins march in the
door.

FALSTAFF How now, lad ! is the wind in that door, i'
faith ? must we all march ?

BARDOLPH . Yea, two and two, Newgate fashion.²

HOSTESS My lord, I pray you, hear me

PRINCE HENRY What sayest thou, mistress Quickly ?
How does thy husband ? I love him well , he is an
honest man

HOSTESS Good my lord, hear me

FALSTAFF Pr'ythee, let her alone, and list to me

PRINCE HENRY What sayest thou, Jack ?

FALSTAFF The other night I fell asleep here, behind
the arras,³ and had my pocket picked

PRINCE HENRY What didst thou lose, Jack ?

FALSTAFF Wilt thou believe me, Hal ? three or four
bonds of forty pound apiece, and a seal-ring of my
grandfather's.

PRINCE HENRY . A trifle, some eightpenny matter.

HOSTESS . So I told him, my lord , and I said I heard
your grace say so and, my lord, he speaks most

¹ A mark was thirteen and fourpence. ² Newgate criminals were
chained together ³ Curtain

vilely of you, like a foul-mouthed man as he is , and said, he would cudgel you

PRINCE HENRY What ! he did not ?

HOSTESS There's neither faith, truth, nor womanhood in me else

FALSTAFF There's no more faith in thee than in a stewed prune nor no more truth in^f thee than in a drawn fox , and for womanhood, maid Marian may be the deputy's wife of the ward to thee Go, you thing, go

HOSTESS Say, what thing ? what thing ?

FALSTAFF What thing ? why, a thing to thank God on.

HOSTESS I am no thing to thank God^c on, I would thou shouldest know it , I am an honest man's wife and, setting thy knighthood aside, thou art a knave to call me so.

FALSTAFF Setting thy womanhood aside, thou art a beast to say otherwise

HOSTESS . Say, what beast, thou knave thou ?

FALSTAFF What beast ? why, an otter.

PRINCE HENRY An otter, sir John ? why an otter ?

FALSTAFF Why ? she's neither fish nor flesh , a man knows not where to have her

HOSTESS Thou art an unjust man in saying so

PRINCE HENRY Thou sayest true, hostess , and he slanders thee most grossly

HOSTESS : So he doth you, my lord , and said this other day, you owed him a thousand pound

PRINCE HENRY Sirrah ! do I owe you a thousand pound ?

FALSTAFF A thousand pound, Hal ! a million thy love is worth a million , thou owest me thy love.

HOSTESS Nay, my lord, he called you Jack, and said
he would cudgel you

FALSTAFF Did I, Bardolph ?

BARDOLPH Indeed, sir John, you said so

FALSTAFF · Yea,—if he said my ring was copper

PRINCE HENRY I say, 'tis copper darest thou be as
good as thy word now ?

FALSTAFF Why, Hal, thou knowest, as thou art but
man, I dare but as thou art prince, I fear thee,
as I fear the roaring of the lion's whelp

PRINCE HENRY And why not, as the lion ?

FALSTAFF The king himself is to be feared as the lion
doest thou think, I'll fear thee as I fear thy father ?

PRINCE HENRY Sirrah, there's no room for faith,
truth, or honesty, in this bosom of thine,—it is all
filled up with guts and midriff. Why, thou impudent,
embossed rascal, if there were anything in thy
pocket but tavern reckonings, and one poor penny-
worth of sugar-candy to make thee long-winded,—
if thy pocket were enriched with any other in-
juries but these, I am a villain, you will not pocket
up wrong Art thou not ashamed ?

FALSTAFF Dost thou hear, Hal ? thou knowest in the
state of innocency, Adam fell ; and what should
poor Jack Falstaff do, in the days of villamy ? Thou
seest, I have more flesh than another man, and
therefore more frailty. You confess, then, you
picked my pocket ?

PRINCE HENRY. It appears so by the story

FALSTAFF Hostess, I forgive thee go make ready
breakfast, love thy husband, look to thy servants,
cherish thy guests : thou shalt find me tractable to
any honest reason thou seest, I am pacified

2

Falstaff goes to the wars, and manages to get credit for bravery in action. When he returns, the Lord Chief Justice sees him in the street. Falstaff is anxious to avoid him, for he knows he is suspected of the robbery at Gadshill; but the Chief Justice will not be denied. He comes up to Falstaff, who pretends not to have noticed him till that moment, and to be very pleased to see him.

CHIEF JUSTICE Sir John Falstaff, a word with you

FALSTAFF My good lord ! Give your lordship good time of day. I am glad to see your lordship abroad. I heard say, your lordship was sick. I hope, your lordship goes abroad by advice.¹ Your lordship, though not clean past your youth, hath yet some smack of age in you, some relish of the saltiness of time, and I most humbly beseech your lordship to have a reverend care of your health.

CHIEF JUSTICE Sir John, I sent for you before your expedition to Shrewsbury.

FALSTAFF An't please your lordship, I hear his majesty is returned with some discomfort from Wales.

CHIEF JUSTICE I talk not of his majesty; you would not come when I sent for you.

FALSTAFF And I hear, moreover, his highness is fallen into this same apoplexy.

CHIEF JUSTICE : Well, heaven mend him !—I pray you, let me speak with you.

FALSTAFF . This apoplexy is, as I take it, a kind of

¹ Has been allowed by your doctor to be out and about

lethargy, an't please your lordship , a kind of sleeping in the blood, a tingling

CHIEF JUSTICE What tell you me of it ? be it as it is

FALSTAFF It hath its original from much grief, from study, and perturbation of the brain . I have read the cause of his effects in Galen¹ it is a kind of deafness

CHIEF JUSTICE I think you are fallen into the disease ; for you hear not what I say to you

FALSTAFF Very well, my lord, very well . rather, an't please you, it is the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking, that I am troubled withal

CHIEF JUSTICE To punish you by the heels,² would amend the attention of your ears and I care not if I do become your physician

FALSTAFF I am as poor as Job, my lord, but not so patient your lordship may administer the potion of imprisonment to me, in respect of poverty , but how I should be your patient to follow your prescriptions, the wise may make some dram of a scruple,³ or, indeed, a scruple itself

CHIEF JUSTICE I sent for you, when there were matters against you for your life, to come speak with me

FALSTAFF . As I was then advised by my learned counsel in the laws of this land-service, I did not come

CHIEF JUSTICE Well, the truth is, Sir John, you live in great infamy

FALSTAFF He that buckles him in my belt cannot live in less ⁴

¹ A famous physician ² Put you in the stocks ³ Dram and scruple were chemist's measures ⁴ It must be " great," because I am such a fat man

CHIEF JUSTICE Your means are very slender, and
your waste is great

FALSTAFF I would it were otherwise, I would my
means were greater, and my waist slenderer

CHIEF JUSTICE You have misled the youthful prince

FALSTAFF The young prince hath misled me I am
the fellow with the great belly, and he my dog

CHIEF JUSTICE Well, I am loth to gall a new-healed
wound your day's service at Shrewsbury hath a
little gilded over your night's exploit on Gadshill
you may thank the unquiet time for your quiet
o'erposting that action ¹

FALSTAFF My lord——

CHIEF JUSTICE But since all is well, keep it so wake
not a sleeping wolf

FALSTAFF To wake a wolf, is as bad as to smell a
fox

CHIEF JUSTICE What ! you are as a candle, the better
part burnt out

FALSTAFF A wassail candle,² my lord, all tallow if
I did say of wax, my growth would approve the
truth

CHIEF JUSTICE There is not a white hair on your face
but should have his effect of gravity

FALSTAFF His effect of gravity, gravity, gravity

CHIEF JUSTICE You follow the young prince up and
down, like his ill angel

FALSTAFF Not so, my lord, your ill angel³ is light,
but I hope he that looks upon me, will take me with-
out weighing and yet, in some respects, I grant,

¹ The Chief Justice means that the wars have distracted attention
from lesser matters, such as a highway robbery ² A feast
candle ³ Angel was also the name of a coin, and a bad angel would
weigh light

I cannot go,—I cannot tell Virtue is of so little regard in these costermonger times, that true valour is turned bear-herd all the other gifts appertinent¹ to man, as the malice of this age shapes them, are not worth a gooseberry You, that are old, consider not the capacities of us that are young, you measure the heat of our livers with the bitterness of your galls and we that are in the vaward² of our youth, I must confess, are wags too

CHIEF JUSTICE Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not a moist eye? a dry hand? a yellow cheek? a white beard? a decreasing³ leg? an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken? your wind short? your chin double? your wit single? and every part about you blasted with antiquity? and will you yet call yourself young? Fie, fie, fie, sir John!

FALSTAFF. My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white head, and something a round belly For my voice, I have lost it with hollaing, and singing of anthems To approve my youth further, I will not the truth is, I am only old in judgment and understanding, and he that will caper with me for a thousand marks, let him lend me the money, and have at him For the box o' the ear that the prince gave you,³ he gave it like a rude prince, and you took it like a sensible lord. I have checked him for it, and the young lion repents, ma'ry, not in ashes and sackcloth, but in new silk and old sack.

¹ Belonging ² Vanguard ³ There is an actual legend that the Prince once struck Judge Gascoigne

CHIEF JUSTICE Well, Heaven send the prince a better companion !

FALSTAFF . Heaven send the companion a better prince ! I cannot rid my hands of him

3

Falstaff is due to go off again to the wars The poor Hostess, who cannot recover any of the money Sir John owes her, is compelled at last to have him arrested for debt With Fang and Snare, the constables, she lies in wait for him in the street

HOSTESS I am undone by his going, I warrant you, he's an infinite thing upon my score¹ —good master Fang, hold him sure,—good master Snare, let him not 'scape He comes continually to Pie Corner (saving your manhood) to buy a saddle, and he's indited to dinner at the Lubbar's Head, in Lumbert Street, to master Smooth's the silkman . I pray ye, since my exion is entered,² and my case so openly known to the world, let him be brought in to his answer A hundred mark is a long one for a poor lone woman to bear and I have borne, and borne, and borne, and have been fubbed off and fubbed off, and fubbed off, from this day to that day, that it is a shame to be thought on There is no honesty in such dealing, unless a woman should be made an ass, and a beast, to bear every knave's wrong (*Enter SIR JOHN FALSTAFF, PAGE, and BARDOLPH*) Yonder he comes, and that arrant malmsey³-nose knave, Bardolph, with him Do your offices, do your offices, master Fang and master Snare, do me, do me, do me your offices

¹ Reckoning, account ² Action is taken ³ Wine

FALSTAFF How now? Whose mare's dead? What's the matter?

FANG Sir John, I arrest you at the suit of Mistress Quickly.

FALSTAFF Away, varlets!—Draw, Bardolph cut me off the villain's head, throw the quean¹ in the channel²

HOSTESS Throw me in the channel! I'll throw thee in the channel Wilt thou? Wilt thou? thou rogue!—Murder, murder! O, thou honey-suckle villain! wilt thou kill God's officers, and the king's? O, thou honey-seed rogue! thou art a honey-seed, a man-queller, and a woman-queller.

FALSTAFF Keep them off, Bardolph

FANG A rescue! a rescue!

HOSTESS Good people, bring a rescue or two! Thou wo't, wo't thou? thou wo't, wo't thou? do, thou rogue! do, thou hemp-seed!

FALSTAFF Away, you scullion! you rampallion! you fustilarian! I'll tickle your catastrophe.

Enter the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, attended

CHIEF JUSTICE What is the matter? keep the peace there, ho!

HOSTESS Good my lord, be good to me! I beseech you, stand to me!

CHIEF JUSTICE How now, Sir John! what, are you brawling here?

Doth this become your place, your time, and business?

You should have been well on your way to York—Stand from him, fellow wherefore hang'st upon him?

¹ Low woman

² Gutter

HOSTESS O, my most worshipful lord, an't please your grace, I am a poor widow of Eastcheap, and he is arrested at my suit ¹

CHIEF JUSTICE For what sum ?

HOSTESS It is more than for some, my lord , it is for all, all I have He hath eaten me out of house and home , he hath put all my substance into that fat belly of his ,—but I will have some of it out again; or I will ride thee o' nights, like the mare

FALSTAFF I think I am as like to ride the mare, if I have any vantage of ground to get up

CHIEF JUSTICE How comes this, sir John ? Fie ! what man of good temper would endure this tempest of exclamation ? Are you not ashamed to enforce a poor widow to so rough a course to come by her own ?

FALSTAFF What is the gross sum that I owe thee ?

HOSTESS Marry, if thou wert an honest man, thyself, and the money too Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin-chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire, upon Wednesday in Whitsun week, when the prince broke thy head for liking his father to a singing-man of Windsor , thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife Canst thou deny it ? Did not good-wife Keech, the butcher's wife, come in then, and call me gossip Quickly ? coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar , telling us, she had a good dish of prawns , whereby thou didst desire to eat some ; whereby I told thee, they were ill for a green wound² ! And didst thou not, when she was gone

¹ Request ² Bad for a fresh wound

down-stairs, desire me to be no more so familiarity with such poor people, saying, that ere long they should call me madam? And didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings? I put thee now to thy book-oath deny it, if thou canst

FALSTAFF My lord, this is a poor mad soul, and she says, up and down the town, that her eldest son is like you she hath been in good case, and the truth is, poverty hath distracted her But for these foolish officers, I beseech you, I may have redress against them

CHIEF JUSTICE Sir John, sir John, I am well acquainted with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way It is not a confident brow, nor the throng of words that come with such more than impudent sauciness from you, can thrust me from a level consideration you have, as it appears to me, practised upon the easy yielding spirit of this woman, and made her serve your uses both in purse and person

HOSTESS Yea, in troth, my lord

CHIEF JUSTICE Pr'ythee, peace Pay her the debt you owe her, and unpay the villany you have done with her. the one you may do with sterling money, and the other with current repentance

FALSTAFF: My lord, I will not undergo this sneap¹ without reply You call honourable boldness, impudent sauciness if a man will make court'sy, and say nothing, he is virtuous No, my lord, my humble duty remember'd, I will not be your suitor I say to you, I do desire deliverance from these officers, being upon hasty employment in the king's affairs

¹ Rebuke

CHIEF JUSTICE You speak as having power to do wrong, but answer in the effect of your reputation, and satisfy the poor woman

FALSTAFF Come hither, hostess (*Taking her aside*)

The poor good-natured soul cannot hold out against him. She withdraws the action, and hands him more money. But his downfall is near at hand. Prince Hal becomes Henry V. There is no more time for Falstaff and nights at the inn and, in a terrible scene, the old man is publicly disowned and turned away. The shock is too much for him. Early in the next play (*Henry V*), the Hostess and the remains of the little group meet sorrowfully.

HOSTESS Pr'ythee, honey-sweet husband, let me bring thee to Staines

PISTOL No, for my manly heart doth yearn — Bardolph, be blithe, Nym, rouse thy vaunting veins, Boy, bristle thy courage up; for Falstaff is dead, and we must yearn therefore

BARDOLPH Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell !

HOSTESS Nay, sure, he's not in hell, he's in Arthur's bosom,¹ if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end, and went away, an it had been any christom² child, 'a parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o' the tide. For after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way, for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields

¹ She means Abraham's bosom ² Christened

“How now, sir John !” quoth I. “what, man ! be of good cheer” So ’a cried out—“God, God, God !” three or four times Now, I, to comfort him, bid him, ’a should not think of God , I hoped, there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet So, ’a bade me lay more clothes on his feet , I put my hand into the bed, and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone , then I felt to his knees, and so upward, and upward, and all was as cold as any stone

The charm of Falstaff, which was so deeply felt by the Hostess, whom he cheated and made use of, by Bardolph, of whose red face he was always making fun, and by Pistol, whom he once threw downstairs, is as powerful as ever to-day We have only been able to touch upon the many scenes in which he appears and anything less than all of him is too little

SHAKESPEARE (continued)

FOR A totally different side of Shakespeare's art, we will turn to the end of one of his tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra*. The beauty and "infinite variety" of the Egyptian queen have so moved the great Mark Antony that he stays on with her, forgetful alike of his wife at Rome and of his duty to his country. Things come to such a pitch that Octavius Cæsar, his fellow triumvir, comes against him with a fleet and army. The Egyptians are easily put to flight. Cleopatra takes refuge inside a monument in her palace. Antony attempts to kill himself, but bungles the attempt. His guards bring him to Cleopatra.

•CLEOPATRA • How now ' is he dead ?
DIOMEDES His death's upon him, but not dead

Look out o' the other side your monument,
His guard have brought him thither

[illegible]

ANTONY Peace!
Not Cæsar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony,
But Antony's hath triumphed on itself

CLEOPATRA So it should be, that none but Antony
Should conquer Antony but woe 'tis so !

ANTONY I am dying, Egypt, dying, only
I here importune death a while, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips

CLEOPATRA I dare not, dear,—
Dear my lord, pardon,—I dare not,
Lest I be taken not the imperious show
Of the full fortun'd Cæsar ever shall
Be brooch'd with me¹, if knife, drugs, serpents,
have
Edge, sting, or operation, I am safe
Your wife² Octavia, with her modest eyes,
And still conclusion, shall acquire no merit
Demuring upon me But come, come, Antony,—
Help me, my women,—we must draw thee up,—
Assist, good friends.

ANTONY O, quick, or I am gone

CLEOPATRA Here's sport indeed !—How heavy weighs
my lord !

Our strength is all gone into heaviness,
That makes the weight . had I great Juno's³ power,
The strong-wing'd Mercury³ should fetch thee up,
And set thee By Jove's side Yet come a little,—
Wishers were ever fools —O, come, come, come ;
(*They draw ANTONY up*)
And welcome, welcome ! die where thou hast liv'd :
Quicken⁴ with kissing . had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out

¹ I will not grace Cæsar's triumph (Roman generals used to return in triumph to the city after a distinguished victory, proceeding through the streets with their captives and spoils) ² Consort of Jove, king of the gods ³ Messenger of the gods ⁴ Come to life

ALL · A heavy sight !

ANTONY I am dying, Egypt, dying

Give me some wine, and let me speak a little

CLEOPATRA No, let me speak, and let me rail so
high,

That the false housewife Fortune break her wheel,
Provok'd by my offence

ANTONY One word, sweet queen ·

Of Cæsar seek you honour, with your safety

CLEOPATRA They do not go together

ANTONY Gentle, hear me

None about Cæsar trust, but Proculeius

CLEOPATRA · My resolution and my hands I'll trust,
None about Cæsar

ANTONY : The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at, but please your thoughts,
In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I liv'd, the greatest prince o' the world,
The noblest, and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman,—a Roman by a Roman
Valiantly vanquish'd Now my spirit is going,
I can no more (ANTHONY *dies*)

CLEOPATRA . Noblest of men, woo't die ? ·

Hast thou no care of me ? shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty ?—O, see, my women,
The crown o' the earth doth melt —my lord !—
O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fallen young boys and girls
Are level now with men ; the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon

Finding that Cæsar means to carry her back to Rome in triumph, Cleopatra resolves to die. A countryman brings her a deadly snake, an asp, in a basket of figs. She calls to Charmian her servant.

Now, Charmian,
 Show me, my women, like a queen : go fetch
 My best attire , I am again for Cydnus¹
 To meet Mark Antony

When the maids return with the clothes, she is ready

Give me my robe, put on my crown , I have
 Immortal longings in me now no more
 The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip :
 Yare,² yare, good Iras , quick. Methinks I hear
 Antony call , I see him rouse himself
 To praise my noble act ; I hear him mock
 The luck of Cæsar, which the gods give men
 To excuse their after wrath : husband, I come
 Now to that name my courage prove my title !
 I am fire, and air , my other elements
 I give to baser life. So, have you done ?
 Come then, and take the last warmth of my lips,
 Farewell, kind Charmian , Iras, long farewell

(Kisses them IRAS falls and dies)

Have I the aspic in my lips ? Dost fall ?
 If thou and nature can so gently part
 The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
 Which hurts, and is desir'd. Dost thou lie still ?
 If thus thou vanishest, thou tell'st the world
 It is not worth leave-taking.

¹ Where the lovers first met ² Quickly

CHARMIAN Dissolve, thick cloud, and rain, that I
may say,

The gods themselves do weep

CLEOPATRA This proves me base,
If she first meet the curléd Antony,
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss,
Which is my heaven to have Come, thou mortal
wretch (*To the asp, which she applies to her breast*)
With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate¹
Of life at once untie · poor venomous fool,
Be angry, and despatch O, couldst thou speak,
That I might hear thee call great Cæsar ass
Unpoliced² !

CHARMIAN O eastern star !

CLEOPATRA Peace, peace !

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,

That sucks the nurse asleep ?

CHARMIAN . O, break ! O, break !

CLEOPATRA As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as
gentle,—

O Antony !—Nay, I will take thee too —

(*Applying another asp to her arm*)

What should I stay——

(*Dies*)

CHARMIAN In this wild world ?—So, fare thee well —

Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies

A lass unparallel'd —Downy windows,³ close ,

And golden Phœbus⁴ never be beheld

Of eyes again so royal ! Your crown's awry⁵ ,

I'll mend it, and then play

Enter the guard, rushing in

1ST GUARD Where is the queen ?

CHARMIAN . Speak softly, wake her not.

¹ Complex ² Mistaken ³ Eyehds ⁴ The sun. ⁵ Crooked

1ST GUARD Cæsar hath sent—

CHARMIAN Too slow a messenger
(*Applies an asp*)

O, come apace, despatch I partly feel thee

1ST GUARD Approach, ho ! All's not well Cæsar's
beguiled

2ND GUARD There's Dolabella, sent from Cæsar, call
him

1ST GUARD . What work is here ! Charmian, is this well
done ?

CHARMIAN It is well done, and fitting for a princess
Descended of so many royal kings

2

To the long list of plays which Shakespeare wrote must be added several in which he collaborated with other writers. It was very common, in his day and later, for several men to join hands in writing a play. Plays were always in demand, and many of the dramatists were hard up, and glad to earn a share of the money paid for a play in the shorter time it would take to write if the labour was shared also. In considering his work, however, we can leave this out of account. Shakespeare is the universal writer. His friend Ben Jonson truly said of him that "he writ not for an age, but for all time." For all time, for all nations yet he was careless of the fate of his manuscripts, and the first collected edition of his plays was not published till seven years after his death.

Although we now have them all in book form, it is important to remember that they are plays, and therefore that we have not experienced them till we

have seen them *acted*. Fortunately, it is easy to see good performances of the best known of the plays—though there are still far too many bad ones. The modern theatre, with its scenery, etc., does not favour short scenes, and so it became the practice to cut and alter the order of scenes so as to fit them more conveniently to modern conditions. The results did great harm to the plays, and, if they had only known it, to the actors. There is only one way to see the plays, and that is as Shakespeare wrote them, quickly, scene following scene without delay in the right order. This is now almost universally realised. At the Old Vic and at Sadler's Wells, Shakespeare, swiftly and sincerely played, makes his appeal to audiences made up of people of every kind, from the humblest to the highest, holding the attention of the navvy in the gallery as surely as that of the scholar in the stalls. Once the introduction is properly made, Shakespeare is everybody's writer.

The secret of his universal appeal is his knowledge of human nature. In other languages than English, the character of his poetry is lost. The language is different, but the spirit remains, the amazing knowledge of the human heart which has never been equalled, and which it is hard to imagine will ever be equalled again. On the Continent, Shakespeare is as popular and as highly honoured as in his own country. Centuries hence, when all our story belongs to history, to have produced Shakespeare may well be judged the greatest achievement of the English race.

CHAPTER XII

BEN JONSON

1

SHAKESPEARE had "little Latin and less Greek" For his Roman tragedies, he relied upon North's translation of Plutarch. The most important of the dramatists who immediately followed him was well able to read both languages in the original Whether this was an advantage to him those who have read his *Sejanus* may take leave to doubt.

Ben Jonson, a man of violent principles, and glad to fight for them, was born in 1573 at Westminster His father, a minister, died soon after he was born, and his mother married a bricklayer When he was twenty, Ben enlisted in the army, and fought with great credit in Flanders Five years later he was known as a dramatist, and his play *Every Man in his Humour* had been performed in Shakespeare's own theatre A period of prosperity followed. He not only wrote a number of successful comedies, but was continually employed in writing masques¹ for the court. In 1618 he visited Scotland, and spent a month with the poet Drummond of Hawthornden, to whom we are indebted for a lively account of Jonson's opinions and behaviour In 1621, he received a Court post and a pension from King James I but, upon the accession of Charles I, his fortunes fell His plays were failures, he became ill,

¹ Spectacular entertainments, with music, dancing, and elaborate scenes, in which the courtiers themselves took part

and, despite a gift and an increase of pension from the King, he ended his career unhappy and poor. His gravestone in Westminster Abbey bears an epitaph of four words only "O rare Ben Jonson!"

It is impossible to disentangle Jonson's good qualities from his faults, because the one rose from the other. He was by nature a fighter, but this was partly because he held such strong opinions. The strong opinions could be some of them put down to obstinacy and to egotism, but Jonson felt as matters of conscience many things which other men were content to regard as matters of opinion. Having once convinced himself that a belief was right, he saw no alternative but to maintain it with all his might, and trounce its enemies. His conscience gave him little rest, in art or in religion. As a young man he was converted to Roman Catholicism, and remained in that faith for many years, returning to the English Church with a fervency of conviction which he signalled by draining the Communion wine at a draught. He killed an actor in a duel, and was for a while in prison. He conducted fierce quarrels with other playwrights, and his best years were taken up with a quarrel against the architect Inigo Jones, which he conducted with characteristic thoroughness.¹ Drummond's account of him shows him often domineering, over-positive, and unpleasant. "He is a great lover and praiser of himself, a contemner and scorner of others, given rather to lose a friend than a jest, jealous of every word and action of those about him, (especially after drink, which is one of the elements² in which he

¹ "He said to Prince Charles of Inigo Jones, that when he wanted words to express the greatest villain in the world, he would call him Inigo" (Drummond) ² A sly hit at the theory of the humours

liveth), a dissembler of ill parts which reign in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth, thinketh nothing well but what either he himself or some of his friends and countrymen hath said or done, he is passionately kind and angry, careless either to gain or keep, vindictive, but, if he be well answered, at himself." Yet a good part of all his quarrelsomeness sprang from the missionary fervour with which he held to his beliefs. He had definite theories of his art, and felt that he was figuratively chastising the devil when he assailed their opponents. Deeply learned in the classics, he regarded them and their traditions as a kind of Bible. The practical and critical duties which they seemed to lay upon him as a writer he took as seriously as the duties the Bible laid upon him as a Christian.

The most important of Jonson's artistic theories was his doctrine of Humours. *Every Man in His Humour*, the first play that was entirely his own work, stated a theory and a programme for the writing of comedy. First of all, Jonson attacked the freedom of the romantic and historical plays, with their improbable plots, their action spread over many places and a number of years, and their attempts, (such as the battles in Shakespeare's historical plays), to represent on the stage events too large for it. He held firm to the classical theory of "the Unities" namely, that a play should concern one central action only, that it should all happen in one place, and that it should not cover a longer space of time than a single day. The characters, moreover, were to be represented in terms of the "Humours." At that time the word "humour" had a precise meaning which it has since lost. The various elements in a man's character were regarded

as due to the four elements in his body, which were called the Hot, the Cold, the Moist, and the Dry and his temperament depended on the way in which these were blended. The purpose of Jonson's comedy, therefore, was to classify characters under their appropriate humours. Every man *in* his humour, as Jonson strove to represent it, was a man living in obedience to the harmony of the elements which were naturally uppermost in his character. Every man *out of* humour was a man in whom, under the pressure of circumstance, one or more elements had exceeded their proper limits and were overwhelming the rest. In a word, Jonson aimed at representing upon the stage "real" life and character, as he understood it. Not only did his doctrine of the humours give rise to the style of comedy known as the comedy of manners, but he was in a real sense the ancestor of Dickens, and of the "character" actors who derive from him. Dickens' trick of labelling a character with a single characteristic saying or mannerism is nothing but a statement of that character's dominant "humour" and Charlie Chaplin and Mabel Constanduros, with her family of Bugginses, all subscribe necessarily to the doctrine of humours.

2

For a sample of Jonson's comedy, let us look at the opening of *Volpone . or The Fox*. The dominant note, or humour, is stated in the first lines.

VOLPONE : Good morning to the day , and next, my gold !—

Open the shrine, that I may see my saint

(*MOSCA withdraws the curtain, and discovers piles of gold, plate, jewels, etc*)

Hail the world's soul, and mine !

He then proceeds to a stratagem to attract gifts from other avaricious men It is simple He lies in bed, pretending to be very ill , and they come one after another, bringing him presents, and hoping to benefit in his will Mosca, Volpone's servant, helps to deceive each of them Here comes one victim of the plot

VOLPONE 'Tis well my pillow now, and let him enter (Exit MOSCA)

Now, my feigned cough, my phthisic,¹ and my gout,
My apoplexy, palsy, and catarrhs,
Help, with your forced functions, this my posture,
Wherein, this three year, I have milked their hopes
He comes ; I hear him—Uh ! (*coughing*) uh ! uh !
uh ! O——

Re-enter MOSCA, Introducing VOLTORE with a piece of plate.

MOSCA You still are what you were, sir Only you,
Of all the rest, are, he commands, his love,
And you do wisely to preserve it thus,
With early visitation and kind notes
Of your good meaning to him, which, I know,
Cannot but come most grateful. Patron ! sir !
Here's Signior Voltore is come——

VOLPONE (*faintly*) . What say you ?

MOSCA Sir, Signior Voltore is come this morning
To visit you

VOLPONE I thank him.

MOSCA And hath brought

¹ Consumption

A piece of antique plate, bought of St Mark,
With which he here presents you

VOLPONE He is welcome

Pray him to come more often

MOSCA Yes

VOLTORE What says he ?

MOSCA He thanks you, and desires you see him often.

VOLPONE Mosca

MOSCA My patron !

VOLPONE Bring him near, where is he ?

I long to feel his hand

MOSCA The plate is here, sir

VOLTORE How fare you, sir ?

VOLPONE I thank you, Signior Voltore ,

Where is the plate ? Mine eyes are bad

VOLTORE (*putting it into his hands*) I'm sorry

To see you still thus weak

MOSCA That he's not weaker (*Aside*)

VOLPONE You are too munificent

VOLTORE No, sir , would to heaven,

I could as well give health to you, as that plate !

VOLPONE You give, sir, what you can I thank you.

Your love

Hath taste in this, and shall not be unanswered

I pray you see me often

VOLTORE Yes, I shall, sir.

VOLPONE Be not far from me

MOSCA · Do you observe that, sir ?

VOLPONE Harken unto me still , it will concern you.

MOSCA . You are a happy man, sir , know your own
good.

VOLPONE I cannot now last long—

MOSCA · You are his heir, sir

VOLTORE : Am I ?

VOLPONE I feel me going , Uh ' uh ' uh ' uh ' !

I'm sailing to my port Uh ' uh ' uh ' uh ' !

And I am glad I am so near my haven

MOSCA Alas, kind gentleman ! Well, we must all go—

VOLTORE : But, Mosca—

MOSCA Age will conquer.

VOLTORE Pray thee, hear me :

Am I inscribed his heir for certain ?

MOSCA . Are you !

I do beseech you, sir, you will vouchsafe

To write¹ me in your family. All my hopes

Depend upon your worship I am lost,

Except the rising sun do shine on me.

VOLTORE It shall both shine and warm thee, Mosca

MOSCA : Sir,

I am a man that hath not done your love

All the worst offices² here I wear your keys,

See all your coffers and your caskets lock'd,

Keep the poor inventory of your jewels,

Your plate and monies , am your steward, sir,

Husband your goods here

VOLTORE But am I sole heir ?

MOSCA Without a partner, sir , confirmed this morning .

The wax's warm yet, and the ink scarce dry

Upon the parchment

VOLTORE Happy, happy, me !

By what good chance, sweet Mosca ?

MOSCA Your desert, sir ,

I know no second cause

¹ Count me one of your family, or household

² Understand " you will agree, won't you, that," etc

VOLTORE Thy modesty

Is not to know it well, we shall requite it

3

The happiest example of Jonson's comedy, however, is that which is least influenced by his theory. In *Bartholomew Fair*, he sets out quite simply to record the bustle and excitement of a London fair.

Win-the-fight, wife of Littlewit, is seized with a longing to eat roast pig at the fair. The local pastor, Brother Zeal-of-the-land Busy, is called in to pronounce whether such a carnal desire may be lawfully gratified by the faithful.

PURECRAFT O brother Busy ! your help¹ here, to edify and raise us up in a scruple¹. my daughter Win-the-fight is visited with a natural disease of women, called a longing to eat pig.

LITTLEWIT : Ay, sir, a Bartholomew Pig, and in the Fair.

PURECRAFT And I would be satisfied from you, religiously-wise, whether a widow of the sanctified assembly, or a widow's daughter, may commit the act without offence to the weaker sisters.

BUSY Verily, for the disease of longing, it is a disease, a carnal disease, or appetite, incident² to women and as it is carnal and incident, it is natural, very natural. now pig, it is a meat, and a meat that is nourishing and may be longed for, and so consequently eaten, it may be eaten, very exceeding well eaten. but in the Fair, and as a Bartholomew pig, it cannot be eaten, for the very calling it a Bartholomew pig, and to eat it so, is a spice of

¹Difficulty ²Natural

idolatry, and you make the Fair no better than one of the high-places. This, I take it, is the state of the question a high-place.

LITTLEWIT · Ay, but in state of necessity, place should give place, master Busy I have a conceit¹ left yet

PURECRAFT . Good brother Zeal-of-the-land, think to make it as lawful as you can.

•LITTLEWIT Yes, sir, and as soon as you can , for it must be, sir you see the danger my little wife is in, sir . .

BUSY Surely, it may be otherwise, but it is subject to construction, subject, and hath a face of offence with the weak, a great face, a foul face , but that face may have a veil put over it, and be shadowed, as it were ; it may be eaten, and in the Fair, I take it, in a booth, the tents of the wicked the place is not much, not very much, we may be religious in the midst of the profane, so it be eaten with a reformed mouth, with sobriety, and humbleness , not gorged in with gluttony or greediness, there's the fear for, should she go there, as taking pride in the place, or delight in the unclean dressing, to feed the vanity of the eye, or lust of the palate, it were not well, it were not fit, it were abominable, and not good.

LITTLEWIT Nay, I knew that afore, and told her on't²; but courage, Win, we'll be humble enough, we'll seek out the homeliest booth in the Fair, that's certain rather than fail, we'll eat it on the ground

PURECRAFT : Ay, and I'll go with you myself, Win-the-fight, and my brother Zeal-of-the-land shall go with us too, for our better consolation

¹ Joke he has just made a pun ² Of it

MRS LITTLEWIT Uh ! Uh !

LITTLEWIT Ay, and Salomon too, Win, the more the merrier Win, we'll leave Rabbi Busy in a booth
(*Aside to Mrs. LITTLEWIT*) Salomon ! my cloak

Enter SALOMON with the cloak

SALOMON Here, sir

BUSY · In the way of comfort to the weak, I will go and eat. I will eat exceedingly, and prophesy, there may be a good use made of it too, now I think on't by the public eating of swine's flesh, to profess our hate and loathing of Judaism, whereof the brethren stand taxed I will therefore eat, yea, I will eat exceedingly

They go to the fair, where the pigs are roasting finely

URSULA How do the pigs, Mooncalf ?

MOONCALF Very passionate, mistress, one of 'em has wept out an eye

Brother Busy arrives, shepherding his little flock

BUSY : So, walk on in the middle way, foreright¹, turn neither to the right hand nor to the left, let not your eyes be drawn aside with vanity, nor your ear with noises

QUARLOUS O, I know him by that start

LEATHERHEAD . What do you lack, what do you buy, mistress ? a fine hobby-horse, to make your son a tilter ?² a drum, to make him a soldier ? a fiddle, to make him a reveller ? what is't you lack ? little dogs for your daughters ? or babies³, male or female.

¹ Straight on ² Tilting meant fighting in a tournament ³ Dolls

BUSY · Look not toward them, hearken not, the place is Smithfield, or the field of smiths, the grove of hobby-horses and trinkets, the wares are the wares of devils, and the whole Fair is the shop of Satan they are hooks and baits, very baits, that are hung out on every side, to catch you, and to hold you, as it were, by the gills, and by the nostrils, as the fisher doth, therefore you must not look nor turn toward them

WINWIFE What flashes come from him !

They come to Ursula's booth

LITTLEWIT (*Gazing at the inscription*) This is fine verily *Here be the best pigs, and she does roast them as well as ever she did*, the pig's head says.

KNOCKEM Excellent, excellent, mistress, with fire o' juniper and rosemary branches !

PURECRAFT Son, were you not warn'd of the vanity of the eye ? have you forgot the wholesome admonition so soon ?

LITTLEWIT Good mother, how shall we find a pig, if we do not look about for't ! will it run off o' the spit, into our mouths, think you, as in Lubberland, and cry, *wee, wee* !

BUSY : No, but your mother, religiously-wise, conceiveth it may offer itself by other means to the sense, as by way of steam, which I think it doth here in this place—huh, huh—yes it doth (*He scents after it like a hound*) And it were a sin of obstinacy, great obstinacy, high and horrible obstinacy, to decline or resist the good titillation¹ of the famelic sense, which is the smell Therefore be bold—huh, huh,

¹ Tickling.

huh—follow the scent enter the tents of the unclean, for once, and satisfy your wife's frailty Let your frail wife be satisfied, your zealous mother, and my suffering self, will also be satisfied

Having eaten, Win-the-fight experiences a fresh longing

PURECRAFT Brother Zeal-of-the-land ! what shall we do ? my daughter Win-the-fight is fallen into her fit of longing again

BUSY : For more pig ! there is no more, is there ?

PURECRAFT . To see some sights in the Fair

BUSY . Sister, let her fly the impurity of the place swiftly, lest she partake of the pitch thereof Thou art the seat of the beast, O Smithfield, and I will leave thee ! Idolatry peepeth out on every side of thee
(*Goes forward*)

KNOCKEM : An excellent right hypocrite ! now his belly is full, he falls a railing and kicking, the jade . I'll in, and joy¹ Ursula, with telling her how her pig works, two and a half he eat to his share and he has drunk a pail-full He eats with his eyes, as well as his teeth.
(*Exit*)

LEATHERHEAD . What do you lack, gentlemen ? what is't you buy ? rattles, drums, babies—

BUSY : Peace, with thy apocryphal² wares, thou profane publican : thy bells, thy dragons, and thy Tobie's dogs Thy hobby-horse is an idol, a very idol, a fierce and rank idol, and thou, the Nebuchadnezzar, the proud Nebuchadnezzar of the Fair, that sett'st it up, for children to fall down to, and worship.

¹ Delight ² Out of the Apocrypha i e, not sanctioned by Holy Writ

LEATHERHEAD Cry you mercy, sir, will you buy a fiddle to fill up your noise ?

Re-enter LITTLEWIT and his WIFE

LITTLEWIT Look, Win, do, look a God's name, and save your longing Here be fine sights

PURECRAFT : Ay, child, so you hate them, as our brother Zeal does, you may look on them

LEATHERHEAD Or what do you say to a drum, sir ?

BUSY It is the broken belly of the beast, and thy bellows are his lungs, and these pipes are his throat, those feathers are of his tail, and thy rattles the gnashing of his teeth

TRASH And what's my gingerbread, I pray you ?

BUSY • The provender that pricks him up. Hence with thy basket of popery, thy nest of images, and whole legend of ginger-work.

LEATHERHEAD Sir, if you be not quiet the quickher, I'll have you clapp'd fairly by the heels, for disturbing the Fair

BUSY The sin of the Fair provokes me, I cannot be silent

PURECRAFT Good brother Zeal !

LEATHERHEAD : Sir, I'll make you silent, believe it.

LITTLEWIT • I'd give a shilling you could, i'faith, friend. *(Aside to LEATHERHEAD)*

LEATHERHEAD Sir, give me your shilling, I'll give you my shop, if I do not ; and I'll leave it in pawn with you in the mean time

LITTLEWIT A match, i'faith, but do it quickly then. *(Exit LEATHERHEAD.)*

BUSY *(to MRS PURECRAFT)* : Hinder me not, woman I was moved in spirit, to be here this day, in this

Fair, this wicked and foul Fair, and fitter may it be called a Foul than a Fair, to protest against the abuses of it, the foul abuses of it, in regard of the afflicted saints, that are troubled, very much troubled, exceedingly troubled, with the opening of the merchandise of Babylon again, and the peeping of popery upon the stalls here, here, in the high places See you not Goldyllocks there, in her yellow gown and green sleeves? the profane pipes, the tinkling timbrels? a shop of relics!

(Attempts to seize the toys)

LITTLEWIT. Pray you forbear, I am put in trust with them

BUSY And this idolatrous grove of images, this flasket of idols, which I will pull down——

(Overthrows the gingerbread basket.)

TRASH O my ware, my ware! God bless it!

BUSY In my zeal, and glory to be thus exercised.

Re-enter LEATHERHEAD, *with* BRISTLE, HAGGISE, and other OFFICERS

LEATHERHEAD Here he is, pray you lay hold on his zeal; we cannot sell a whistle for him in tune Stop his noise first

BUSY Thou canst not, 'tis a sanctified noise, I will make a loud and most strong noise, till I have daunted the profane enemy And for this cause——

LEATHERHEAD Sir, here's no man afraid of you, or your cause You shall swear it in the stocks, sir.

BUSY I will thrust myself into the stocks, upon the pikes of the land *(They seize him)*

LEATHERHEAD Carry him away

PURECRAFT What do you mean, wicked men?

BUSY Leave them alone, I fear them not

Exeunt OFFICERS *with* BUSY, *followed by* DAME
PURECRAFT

Busy is haled off, testifying vociferously, to the stocks where we may leave him

4

Jonson's two tragedies, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, are heavy and correct. They keep the classical rules, and lose almost everything else. He had another side to his nature, however, a vein of pure poetry, light, graceful, and strong. Here is his epitaph on Salathiel Pavy, a boy actor and singer at the Royal Chapel:—

*Weep with me, all you that read
This little story
And know, for whom a tear you shed
Death's self is sorry,
'Twas a child that so did thrive
In grace and feature,
As heaven and nature seem'd to strive
Which owned the creature
Years he numbered scarce thirteen
When fates turned cruel,
Yet three filled zodiacs¹ had he been
The stage's jewel,
And did act, what now we moan,
Old men so duly.
As, sooth, the Pæcæ² thought him one,
He played so truly,
So, by error to his fate,
They all consented,
But viewing him since, alas, too late!
They have repented,*

¹ Full years ² Fates who measured men's lives

*And have sought, to give new birth,
 In baths to steep him ,
 But being so much too good for earth,
 Heaven vows to keep him*

And here, in conclusion, is his famous song, one of the simplest and most happy in the language

*Drink to me only with thine eyes,
 And I will pledge with mine ,
 Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
 And I'll not look for wine
 The thirst, that from the soul doth rise,
 Doth ask a drink divine
 But might I of Jove's nectar¹ sup,
 I would not change for thine*

*I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
 Not so much honouring thee
 As giving it a hope, that there
 It could not wither'd be.
 But thou thereon didst only breathe,
 And sent'st it back to me
 Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
 Not of itself, but thee*

Drummond tells us that Ben loved above all things to be called honest but he must surely be contented with his epitaph, and, looking back on the mass of his work, and his sturdy, independent, quarrelsome, likeable life, we can repeat affectionately " O Rare Ben Jonson "

¹ The drink of the gods